THE NEW ZEALAND INITIATIVE

New Zealand by Comparison

2026 Edition

What the world's data reveals about our place in it

Edited by Oliver Hartwich and Bryce Wilkinson

New Zealand by Comparison, 2026 Edition

Published by The New Zealand Initiative
PO Box 10147, Wellington 6143, New Zealand
www.nzinitiative.org.nz

The New Zealand Initiative is an independent public policy think tank supported by chief executives of major New Zealand businesses. We believe in evidence-based policy and are committed to developing policies that work for all New Zealanders. Our mission is to help create a competitive, open and dynamic economy and a free, prosperous, fair and cohesive society.

Every chart and figure in this publication is documented in the bibliography. Drafted with research and production assistance from Claude (Anthropic). All data were compiled from the official and international sources cited.

Contents

Foreword

New Zealand by Numbers, this book's companion, asked how New Zealand has changed. This book asks the question that haunts every honest answer to the first: compared with what?

A country marking its own homework will always find something to praise. Life expectancy up, smoking down, roads safer, the long patient gains that *New Zealand by Numbers* records are real. But every rich country can recite the same list. The test that matters is relative, because people, capital and ideas all choose between countries, and they consult the comparative tables, not the domestic ones. The New Zealand-born now living overseas equal roughly one in eight of the resident population, a ratio only Ireland exceeds among the countries in this book.

So we have lined New Zealand up beside 28 peers: the Anglosphere it belongs to, the Nordic and Alpine small states it likes to be compared with, the European powers, the Asian tigers, the transformation economies climbing from below and the two giants, China and India. Across twelve chapters and more than a hundred indicators, the same official and international sources throughout, every country gets the same ruler.

The verdict is neither the complacent story nor the catastrophist one. New Zealand ranks first in this book for labour force participation, first (jointly with Australia) for single-parent households, first, alas, for real house price growth this century. It ranks second for economic freedom, third for renewable electricity, third for obesity, fourth for honesty in government, sixth for imprisonment. It ranks twentieth for productivity, twenty-second for trade openness, twenty-sixth for economic complexity and twenty-sixth for the share of government that happens outside Wellington. The pattern repays study: New Zealand's society and institutions consistently outrank its economy.

That pattern is the book's argument, made by the numbers rather than by us. Trust, safety nets, clean government and willing workers are the hard part of national success, and New Zealand has them. What it lacks – capital per worker, scale, competition, land you may build on – is the part policy can actually fix. Countries in this book have fixed it: Estonia was poorer than Turkey within living memory and now outscores Finland's schools; South Korea has overtaken New Zealand's wages from a starting point of postwar ruin.

Readers will find rankings here to argue with, and we hope they do. Every source is listed, every method noted, and the numbers, as always, are the beginning of the argument rather than the end of it.

Dr Oliver Hartwich
Executive Director
The New Zealand Initiative
Wellington, July 2026

A note on the data

Comparing countries is harder than comparing years, and this page sets out how we have tried to do it honestly.

Every figure comes from a named international source: the World Bank, the OECD, United Nations agencies, the WHO, the ILO, the IMF, the Bank for International Settlements, UNCTAD, UNESCO and the specialist compilers cited in the bibliography, from the World Prison Brief to Transparency International. International sources are used even where domestic statistics are fresher, because comparability, not freshness, is this book's purpose. Where a domestic figure differs materially from the harmonised one, New Zealand's home ownership rate is an example, the text says so.

New Zealand's 28 comparators, 29 countries in all with New Zealand itself, were chosen to give it meaningful company: all of the Five Eyes and G7, the small advanced economies of Europe and Asia it is most often measured against, the Nordic bloc entire, transformation economies from Estonia to Chile, and China, India and Brazil for global scale. Charts rank all countries with data; where a source covers only OECD members, the chart says so and shows fewer bars. Three charts, homicide, foreign investment stock and local government scale, span such extreme ranges that they are drawn as dot plots on logarithmic scales, where bars would make everything but the outlier invisible. On every chart, New Zealand's bar is highlighted, countries are coloured by group, and the OECD average is marked where it exists.

Not everything survives translation. Recorded crime, as Chapter 5 explains, cannot be compared across borders and is not. Averages of dwelling size mix stock and new-build definitions. Survey measures of trust, safety and satisfaction carry the cultures of their respondents. Where a measure is weak, the accompanying text says so rather than hiding it; where a gap exists, as with cross-country AI surveys that omit New Zealand, the gap is reported, not papered over.

Reference years are the latest available for each country, marked on every chart and in every ranking; most cluster in 2022 to 2025. Data were current to early July 2026, and where a later edition of an index appeared while this book was in production, the edition used is named in the text. Figures are rounded for readability, and the precise values sit in the sources listed at the back.

The country groups

Each of the 28 comparators earns its place. First come the advanced English-speaking countries New Zealand has always measured itself against, Australia, Britain, the United States, Canada and Ireland, a family that contains all of New Zealand's Five Eyes partners. Next come the other large advanced economies, inside and outside the G7: Germany, France, Italy and Japan, joined by Spain and South Korea.

Then come the small advanced economies, the countries whose problems and possibilities most resemble New Zealand's own. Several of them The New Zealand Initiative has studied first-hand on its business delegations of recent years, to Switzerland, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands, and two of them, Austria and Slovakia, are the destinations of next year's delegation. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Singapore and Israel complete the set. The transformation economies, Poland, Slovakia, Estonia, Chile and Turkey, show what convergence looks like while it is happening, and Brazil adds South American scale. China and India are here for the most practical reason of all: they are the two Asian giants with which New Zealand does ever more of its business.

Throughout the book, every chart colours these countries by group, with New Zealand always in teal:

The three-letter codes that label each chart are listed here once, in the colour of each country's group:

AUS	Australia	**EST**	Estonia	**NLD**	Netherlands
AUT	Austria	**FIN**	Finland	**NOR**	Norway
BRA	Brazil	**FRA**	France	**NZL**	New Zealand
CAN	Canada	**GBR**	Britain	**POL**	Poland
CHE	Switzerland	**IND**	India	**SGP**	Singapore
CHL	Chile	**IRL**	Ireland	**SVK**	Slovakia
CHN	China	**ISR**	Israel	**SWE**	Sweden
DEU	Germany	**ITA**	Italy	**TUR**	Turkey
DNK	Denmark	**JPN**	Japan	**USA**	United States
ESP	Spain	**KOR**	South Korea		

The groupings are conveniences, not verdicts, and two are judgment calls: Chile, an OECD member for sixteen years, sits with the emerging economies on income rather than membership, and Slovakia is counted with Central and Eastern Europe although it belongs to the small-advanced story too. Where a chart shows an OECD average, it averages the 25 OECD members present in this book, New Zealand included, and charts drawn from narrower sources carry a country count in the text.

CHAPTER ONE

Population

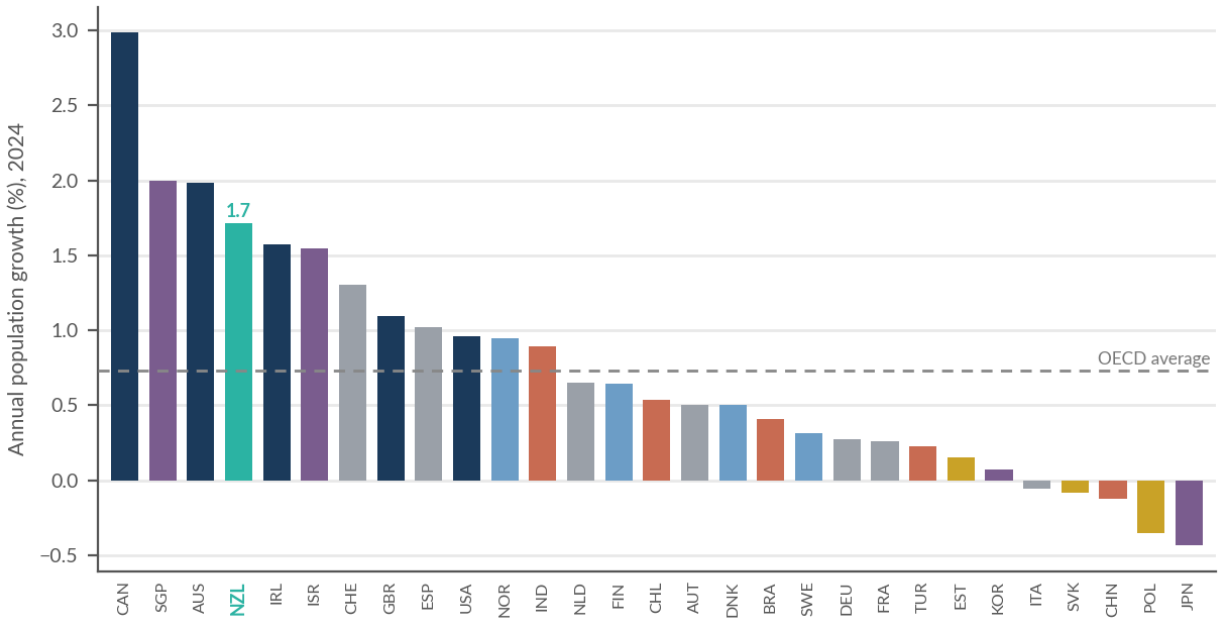
Every comparison in this book rests on a simple fact: New Zealand is a small, young, fast-growing country in a rich world that is mostly none of those things. A population of 5.3 million would make New Zealand a middling German state or a modest Chinese city. Among the 29 countries compared here, only Estonia, Ireland, Slovakia and a few others play in the same demographic league.

Small, but unusually dynamic. New Zealand's population grew faster in 2024 than all but three of the countries in this book, and its median age of 37.5 years makes it younger than 22 of them. The countries New Zealand most resembles culturally, Britain and the nations of Western Europe, are a decade further into the ageing process. The problems of a greying society that dominate this book's later chapters arrive here with a lag, which is a gift, provided the lag is used.

What sets New Zealand apart most, though, is churn. Nearly three residents in ten were born somewhere else, a share only Singapore, Switzerland and Australia exceed. At the same time, the New Zealand-born living abroad equal roughly one in eight of the resident population, second only to Ireland. No other country in this book sits near the top of both lists. New Zealand is simultaneously one of the world's great importers and great exporters of people, a revolving door at the end of the Pacific.

That double openness frames everything that follows. A country that people can leave so easily must give them reasons to stay, and a country that admits so many newcomers must make the arrangement work. The chapters on productivity, housing and government that follow are, in the end, about exactly that.

1.01 Population growth



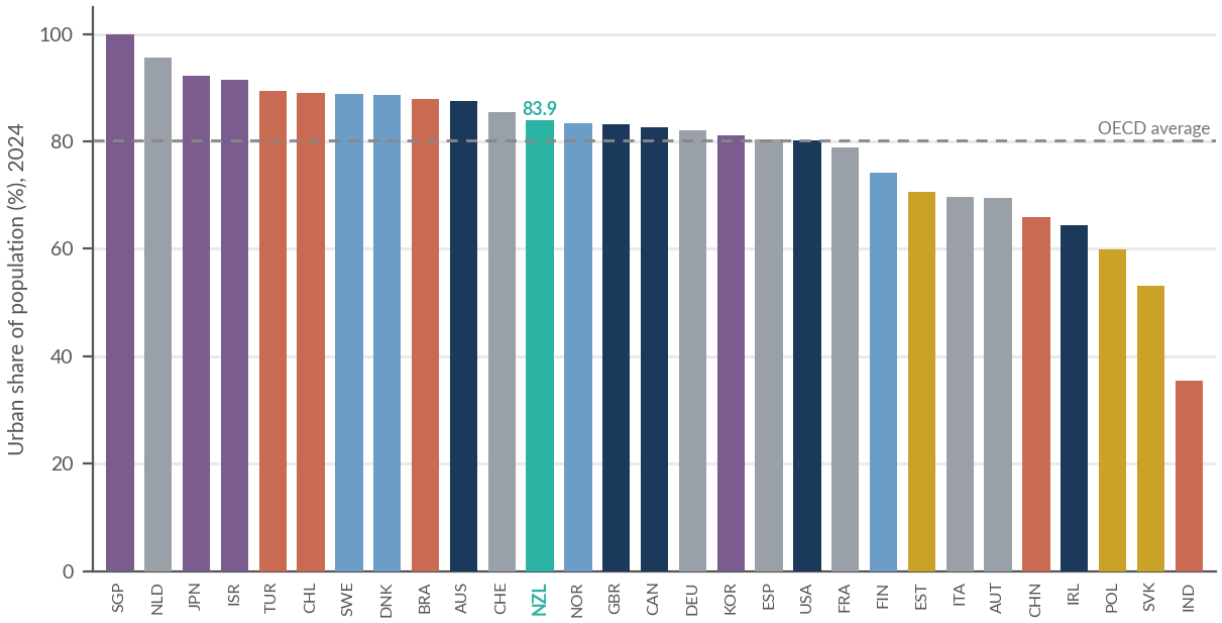
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

New Zealand's population grew by 1.7% in 2024, the fourth-fastest rate among the 29 countries in this book. Only Canada (3.0%), Singapore (2.0%) and Australia (2.0%) grew faster, and every one of those countries, like New Zealand, grew chiefly through migration. The OECD average was 0.7%, less than half New Zealand's pace.

The bottom of the chart shows where much of the rich world is heading. Japan shrank by 0.4% in 2024, Poland by 0.3% and China, for the third year running, recorded falling population. Italy and Slovakia joined them below zero. About a fifth of the countries in this book are now at or past their population peak.

New Zealand's position is not an accident of one year. In 2000, the country grew by 0.6%; by 2024 the rate had almost trebled, while the United States slowed from 1.1% to 1.0% over the same period. Growth on this scale is a vote of confidence, but it must be housed, schooled and moved about. Whether the country builds enough for the people it attracts is the subject of Chapter 9.

1.02 Urbanisation



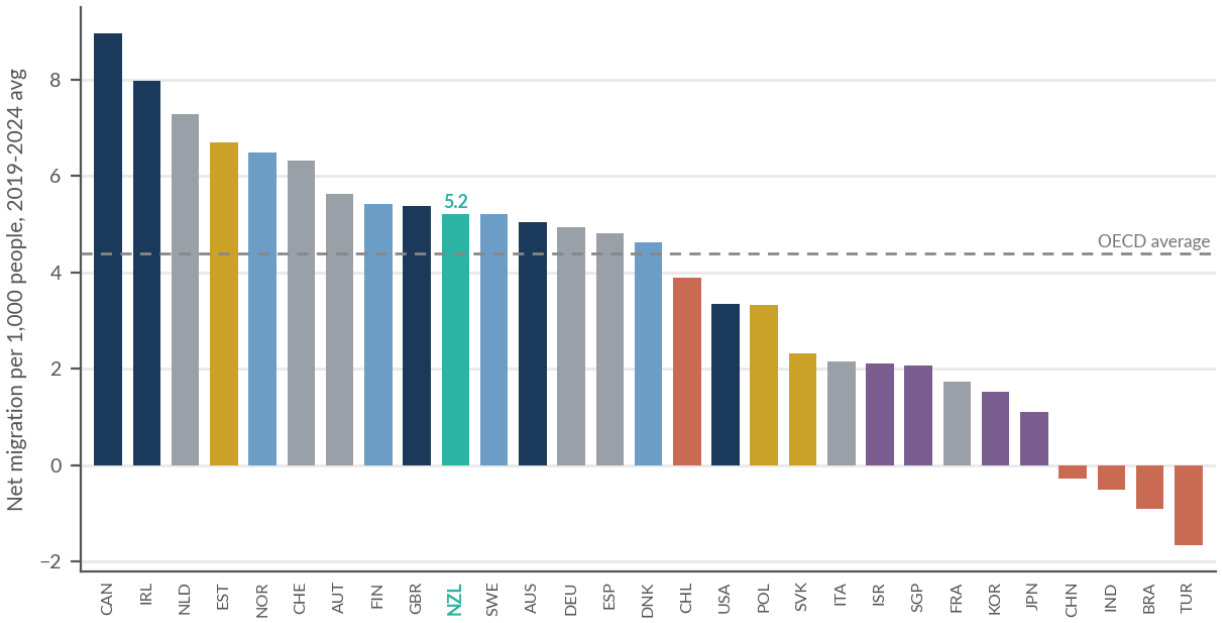
Source: World Bank; UN World Urbanization Prospects

New Zealand thinks of itself as a rural nation and lives as an urban one. In 2024, 83.9% of New Zealanders lived in urban areas on the definitions the World Bank currently applies, placing the country 12th of 29 and comfortably above the OECD average of 80.2%. The farming self-image and the suburban reality have coexisted for a century.

The neighbours on the chart are telling. New Zealand sits between Switzerland (85.5%) and Norway (83.3%), and just above Britain (83.2%) and Canada (82.7%). Australia, at 87.6%, is more urban still. At the extremes, Singapore is a city outright, the Netherlands and Japan exceed 92%, while India (35.4%), Slovakia (53.2%) and Poland (60.0%) remain substantially rural societies.

What distinguishes New Zealand is not the urban share but its stability. The share has moved barely three percentage points since 1970, when it stood at 80.4%, because urbanisation was essentially complete two generations ago. In the United States the urban share rose from 73.5% to 80.1% over the same half century, and in China the same move took fifteen years. New Zealand's great migration from the land is history; the question now is how well its cities work.

1.03 Net migration



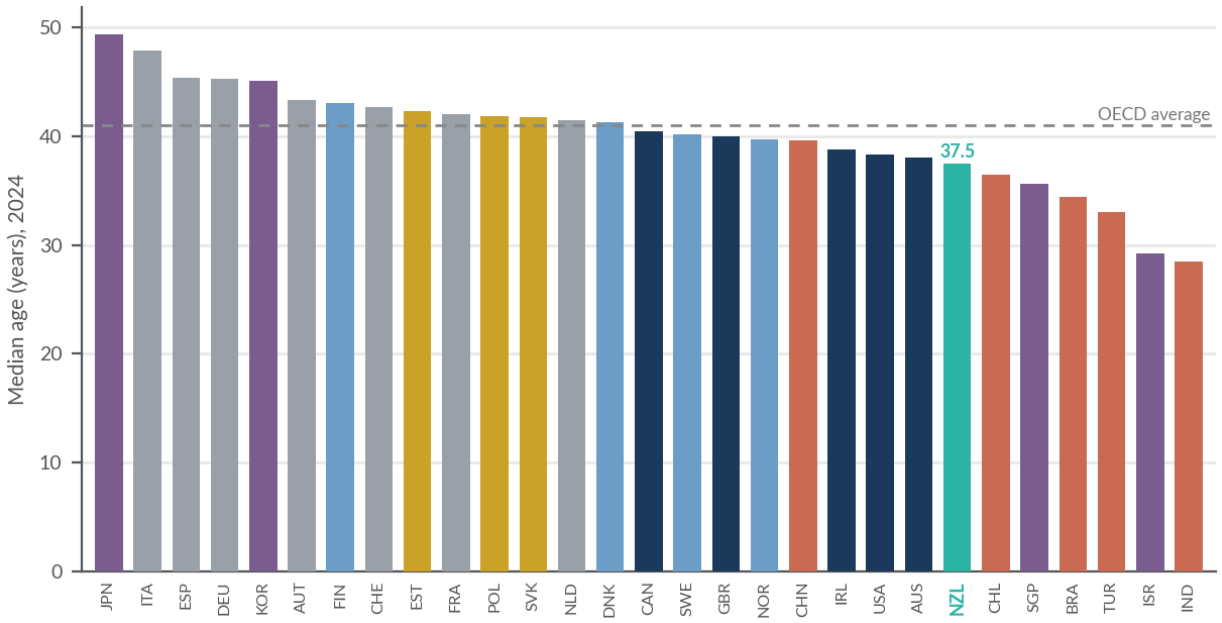
Source: World Bank; UN World Population Prospects

Averaged over 2019 to 2024, New Zealand gained 5.2 migrants a year for every 1,000 residents, tenth of the 29 countries and ahead of the OECD average of 4.4. Canada led the field at 9.0 per 1,000, followed by Ireland (8.0) and the Netherlands (7.3). Britain, at 5.4, and Australia, at 5.0, bracket New Zealand almost exactly.

The chart divides the world into three groups. The settler societies and small rich European countries all gain people. The big emerging economies lose them: India, Brazil and Turkey all recorded net outflows, and China joined them. Japan and South Korea, the countries that most need migrants on demographic grounds, admit the fewest, at 1.1 and 1.5 per 1,000.

For New Zealand the average conceals wild swings, from a record net gain in 2023 to a far quieter inflow since, as Stats NZ's monthly releases attest. But the six-year average is the fairer measure, and it confirms that New Zealand remains what it has been since the nineteenth century: a country that grows by invitation. The other side of that ledger, the New Zealanders who leave, appears at 1.08.

1.04 Median age



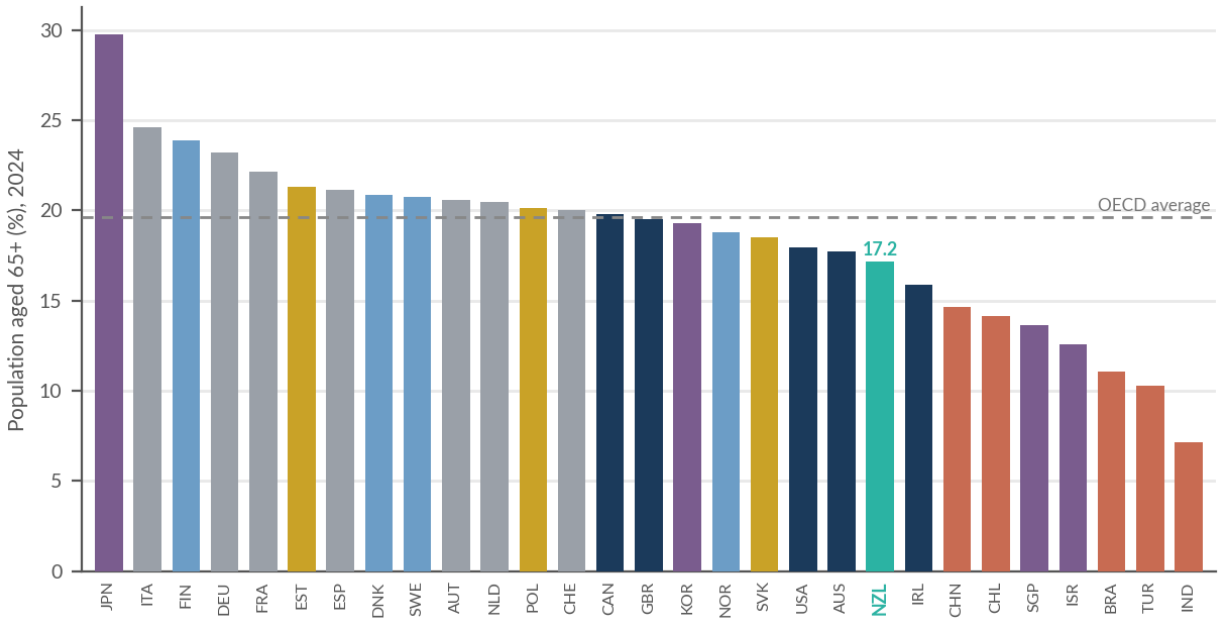
Source: UN World Population Prospects via Our World in Data

Half of all New Zealanders are younger than 37.5 years. That makes New Zealand the seventh-youngest country in this book, older only than Chile, Singapore, Brazil, Turkey, Israel and India. Japan's median is 49.4 years, Italy's 47.8 and Germany's 45.3. The OECD average, at 41.0, is three and a half years older than New Zealand.

Among the Anglosphere, the ordering is tight but consistent: New Zealand (37.5) is younger than Australia (38.0), the United States (38.3), Ireland (38.7), Britain (40.0) and Canada (40.5). Israel, at 29.2, is the great outlier of the developed world, kept young by the rich world's highest birth rate, as 2.04 shows.

The comfort should be qualified. In 1970, the median New Zealander was 24.6 years old; the country has aged 13 years in half a century and the direction is unchanged. New Zealand is not escaping the ageing of the rich world, merely running a decade behind Western Europe and East Asia. The sensible reading of this chart is not relief but warning with notice: everything Japan and Italy now struggle with is on New Zealand's own timetable.

1.05 Age structure



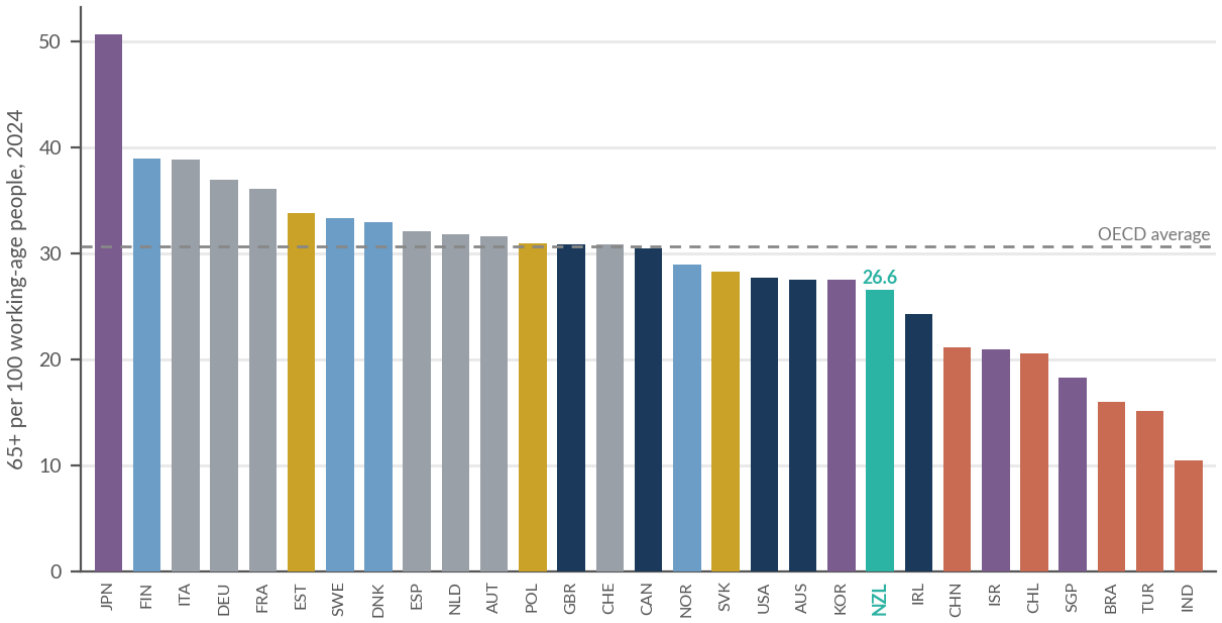
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

In 2024, 17.2% of New Zealanders were aged 65 or over, the ninth-lowest share among the 29 countries and below the OECD average of 19.6%. Japan, where 29.8% have passed 65, shows the far end of the road. Italy (24.6%), Finland (23.9%) and Germany (23.2%) are well along it. Among the rich countries, only Ireland, Singapore, Chile and Israel are younger than New Zealand, along with the emerging economies.

Across the Tasman it is almost a dead heat, Australia at 17.7% and New Zealand at 17.2%, and the United States sits at 17.9%. All three settler societies have been kept young by the same force: sustained migration of working-age people, on a scale few European countries have matched over the long run.

The under-15 share tells the same story from the other end: New Zealand's children still outnumber its pensioners, which is no longer true in most of Europe and East Asia. In 1970 New Zealand's over-65 share was 8.5%; it has doubled in fifty years and Stats NZ projects it will keep climbing. The two lines that crossed long ago in Japan are converging here too, just later.

1.06 Old-age dependency

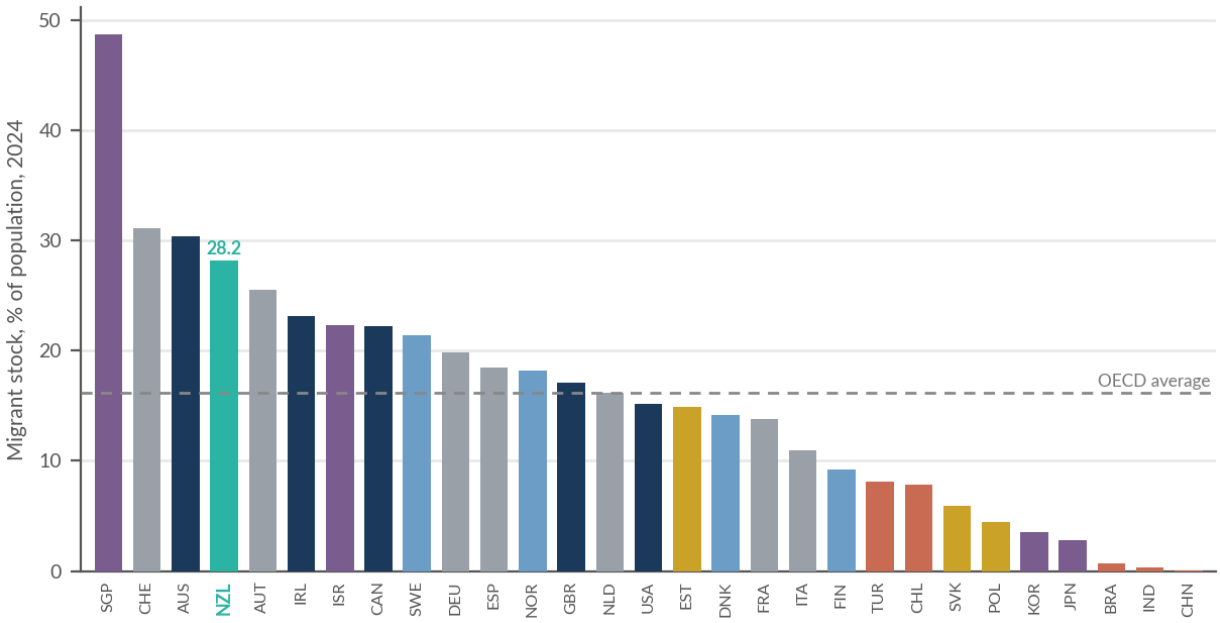


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

For every 100 New Zealanders of working age there are 26.6 aged 65 and over, the ninth-lowest ratio in this book and well under the OECD average of 30.7. Japan carries 50.7 retirees per 100 workers, nearly twice New Zealand's load. Finland (38.9), Italy (38.8) and Germany (36.9) follow. Among the comparators, only Ireland, Israel, Chile, Singapore and the big emerging economies carry less than New Zealand.

The trend matters more than the level. New Zealand's ratio was 18.0 in 2000; it has risen by almost half in a generation, and the same arithmetic that took Japan from where New Zealand is now to where Japan is today runs on compounding, not on surprise. Australia has travelled in near lockstep, from 18.4 to 27.5. Every retirement income debate in New Zealand takes place against this chart. A pension age of 65, set when the ratio was far lower, meets a very different world at a ratio of 40, which is roughly where the UN projects New Zealand by mid-century. Many of the countries above New Zealand on this chart have raised their pension ages, some repeatedly.

1.07 Foreign-born population



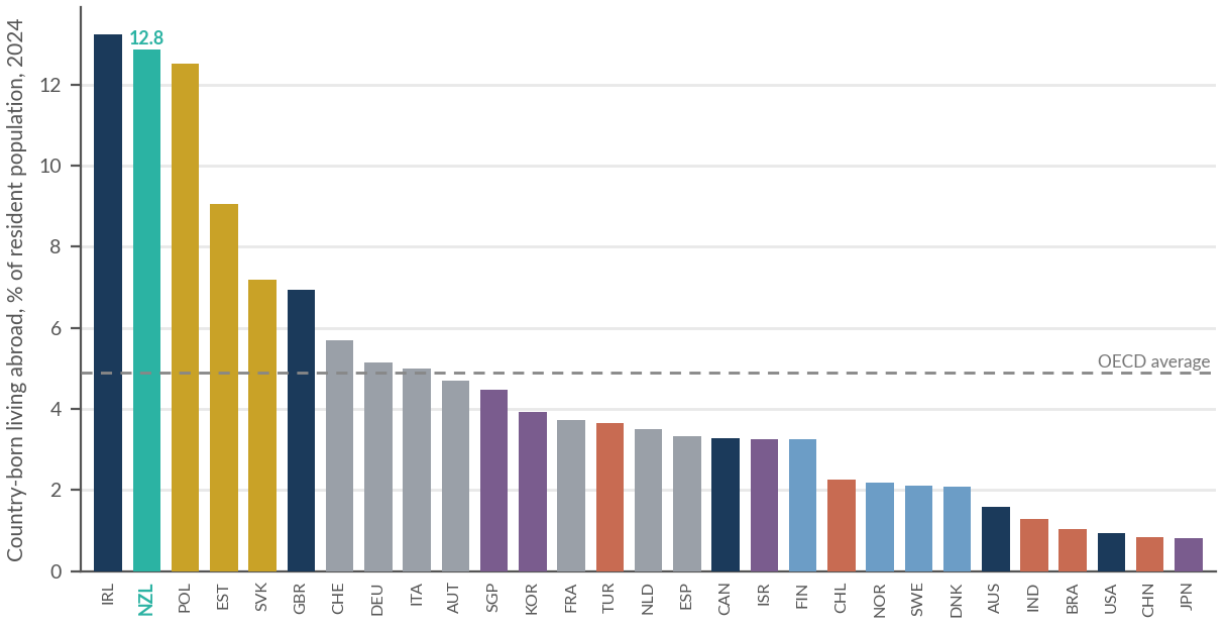
Source: UN DESA International Migrant Stock via World Bank

Nearly three in ten New Zealand residents, 28.2%, were born overseas. Among the 29 countries only Singapore (48.7%), Switzerland (31.1%) and Australia (30.4%) have a larger foreign-born share, and the OECD average of 16.2% is barely more than half New Zealand's figure. Britain stands at 17.1%, the United States at 15.2% and Canada, so often cited as the great immigration society, at 22.2%.

At the other end sit the countries migration has barely touched: China (0.1%), India (0.3%) and Brazil (0.7%), along with Japan (2.8%) and South Korea (3.5%). The rich Asian democracies have grown old with the door closed; the settler societies have stayed young with it open.

In 1990, 15.5% of New Zealand residents were foreign-born; the share has nearly doubled since. Britain's rose faster still, from 6.4% to 17.1%. New Zealand has run one of the developed world's largest immigration programmes relative to its size, and has done so with less political rancour than most of its Anglosphere peers. That achievement deserves more notice than it gets.

1.08 The diaspora



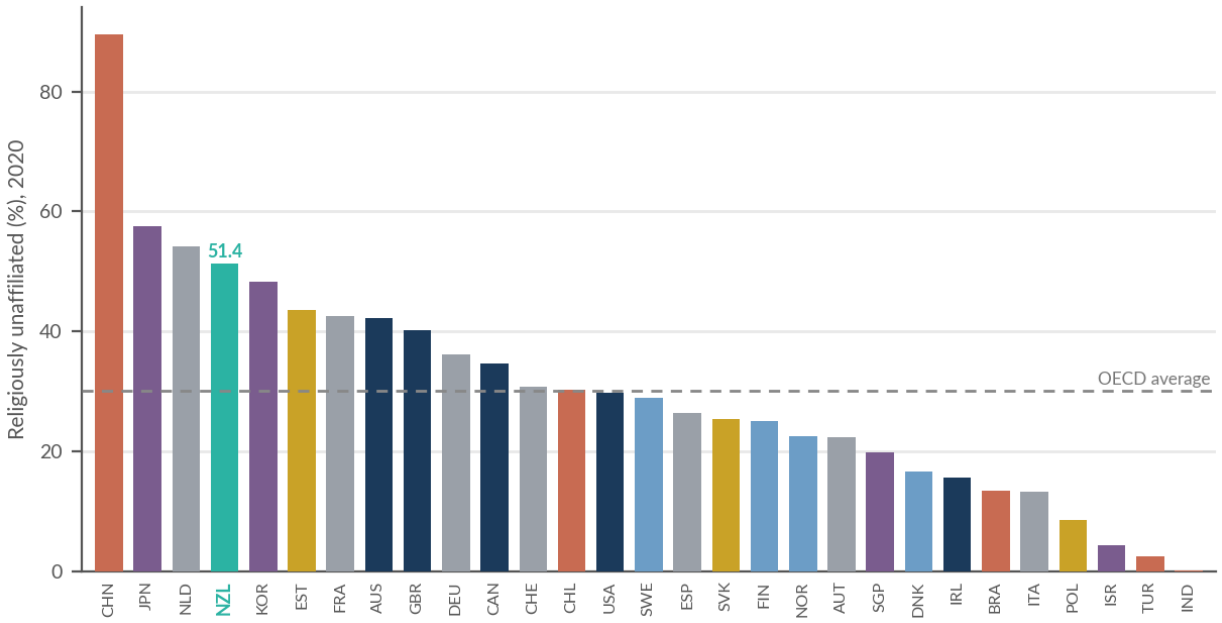
Source: UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024 (by origin); World Bank population

New Zealand-born people living abroad equal about 12.8% of the resident population, roughly one for every eight New Zealanders at home. Only Ireland, at 13.2%, has a larger diaspora relative to its resident population, and Ireland's reflects a long history of famine, poverty and later economic emigration. Poland (12.5%), Estonia (9.1%) and Slovakia (7.2%), the post-communist emigration societies, complete the top five. The OECD average is 4.9%.

Countries normally appear high on this list or on 1.07's, not both: senders send and receivers receive. Only New Zealand and Ireland sit near the top of both, and New Zealand's combination, second for its diaspora and fourth for its foreign-born share, is the more extreme. Australia, the destination of most departing New Zealanders, has a diaspora of just 1.6% of its population.

The economics of this churn are debated; the meaning of it is not. Exit is cheap for New Zealanders, in language, in law and in airfares, and Australia offers a well-documented income premium for the same work, as Chapter 7 quantifies. A country whose citizens can leave this easily lives under permanent competitive discipline, and this chart measures it.

1.09 No religion



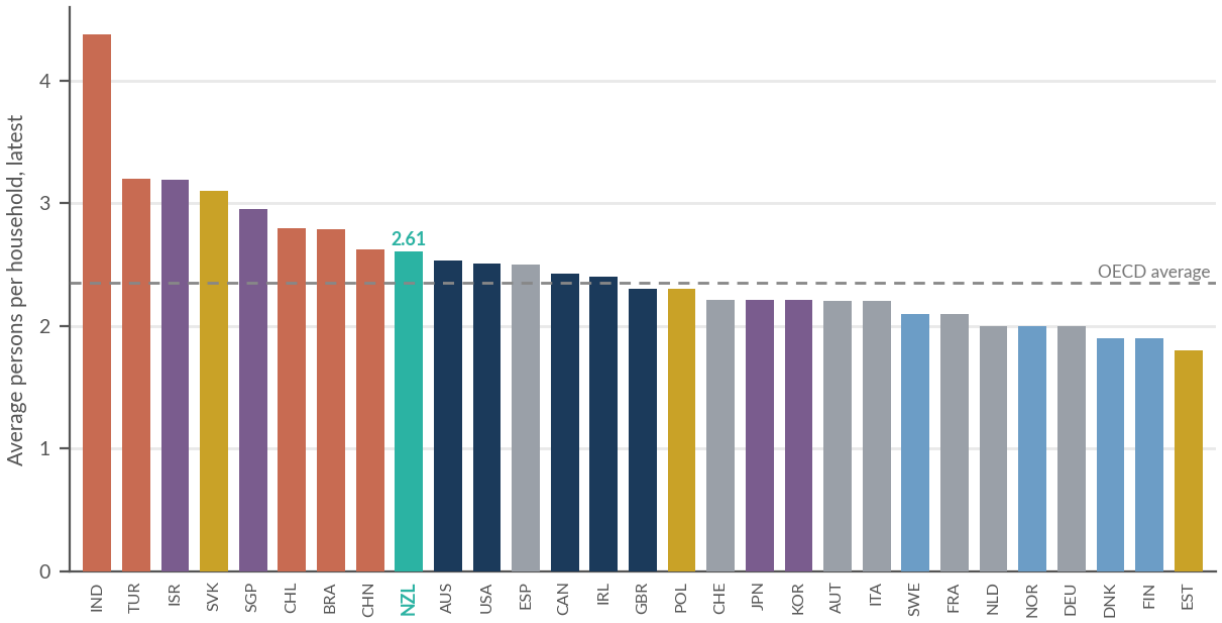
Source: Pew Research Center, Global Religious Landscape

On Pew Research Center's harmonised estimates, 51.4% of New Zealanders were religiously unaffiliated in 2020, the fourth-highest share in this book. Only China (89.6%), where the state suppresses affiliation, Japan (57.5%) and the Netherlands (54.1%) rank higher. New Zealand is, on this measure, the most secular country in the English-speaking world, ahead of Australia (42.3%), Britain (40.2%), Canada (34.6%) and the United States (29.7%).

The gradient across the chart is as much historical as theological. The unaffiliated share falls below 10% in Poland and reaches near zero in India and Turkey, where religion and national identity remain fused. Ireland, a byword for piety within living memory, now records 15.6% unaffiliated and is climbing fast.

Across the Western countries on this chart, the movement runs one way. Between 2010 and 2020 the unaffiliated share rose in every one of them, in Australia from 24.9% to 42.3% and in the United States from 16.5% to 29.7%. New Zealand rose from 44.2% to 51.4% and its 2023 Census, which puts the share at 51.6%, agrees almost exactly. Few social changes of the past two generations have been as complete, and few have attracted as little comment.

1.10 Household size



Source: OECD Family Database; UN DESA; national statistical offices

The average New Zealand household contains 2.61 people, the ninth-largest of the 29 countries and well above the OECD average of 2.35. The gradient runs from India (4.4), Turkey (3.2) and Israel (3.2) at the top to a striking cluster at the bottom: Estonia (1.8), Finland and Denmark (1.9), and Germany, Norway and the Netherlands (2.0). In much of Northern Europe the typical household is now a single person or a couple, full stop.

New Zealand's households are larger than those of every Western European country in this book and larger than Australia's (2.5), Canada's (2.4) and Britain's (2.3). Only the emerging economies, along with Israel, Singapore and Slovakia, exceed it. Some of that reflects New Zealand's younger population and larger families; some of it, less happily, reflects a housing market that keeps adult children at home and pushes families into shared dwellings, as Chapter 9 documents.

The comparison carries a warning for housing policy. Northern Europe's small households mean that a million people there need far more dwellings than a million New Zealanders do today. As New Zealand ages and household sizes drift down towards European levels, demand for homes will grow even if population growth slows. Household formation, not population, is what housing markets must satisfy.

CHAPTER TWO

Children and Families

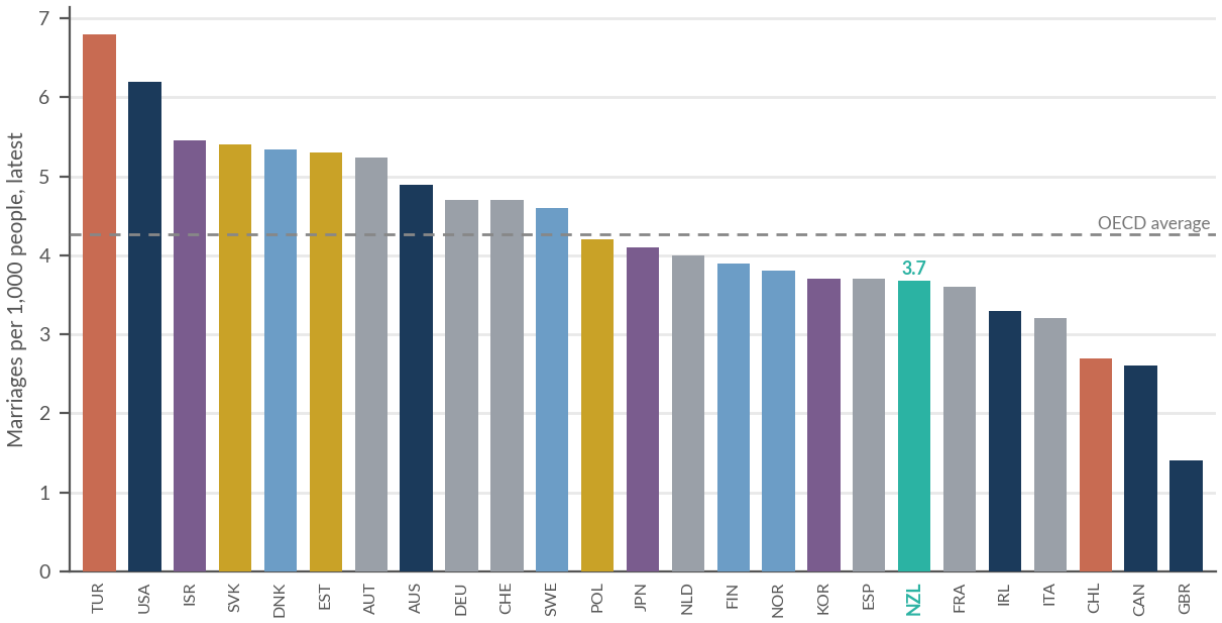
The family revolution that *New Zealand by Numbers* traced at home, later marriage, fewer children, more births outside wedlock, turns out to be the rich world's revolution, not New Zealand's. Every Western country on these charts has travelled the same road since 1970. What the comparison reveals is where each country has got to, and the answers are less uniform than the shared direction suggests.

New Zealand sits, broadly, where the English-speaking world sits: marriage rarer than in America but more common than in Italy or Canada, births outside marriage nearly half the total, divorce low and falling. On fertility, though, New Zealand stands out. At 1.57 births per woman the country is sixth of 29, behind only Israel, India and a handful of others, at a moment when South Korea has fallen to 0.75 and half of Europe sits below 1.4.

Two charts in this chapter deserve particular attention. New Zealand has the joint-highest share of single-parent households of the 24 countries with comparable data, level with Australia, a ranking with obvious consequences for child poverty and for the welfare debates of Chapter 7. And New Zealand's teenage birth rate, for all its steep fall at home, remains sixth-highest here, nearly double the OECD average.

The chapter also measures what governments do for families and what childhood costs. New Zealand spends more on family benefits than the OECD average, yet records a child poverty rate above it. Spending and outcomes, here as everywhere in this book, are different things.

2.01 Marriage rate



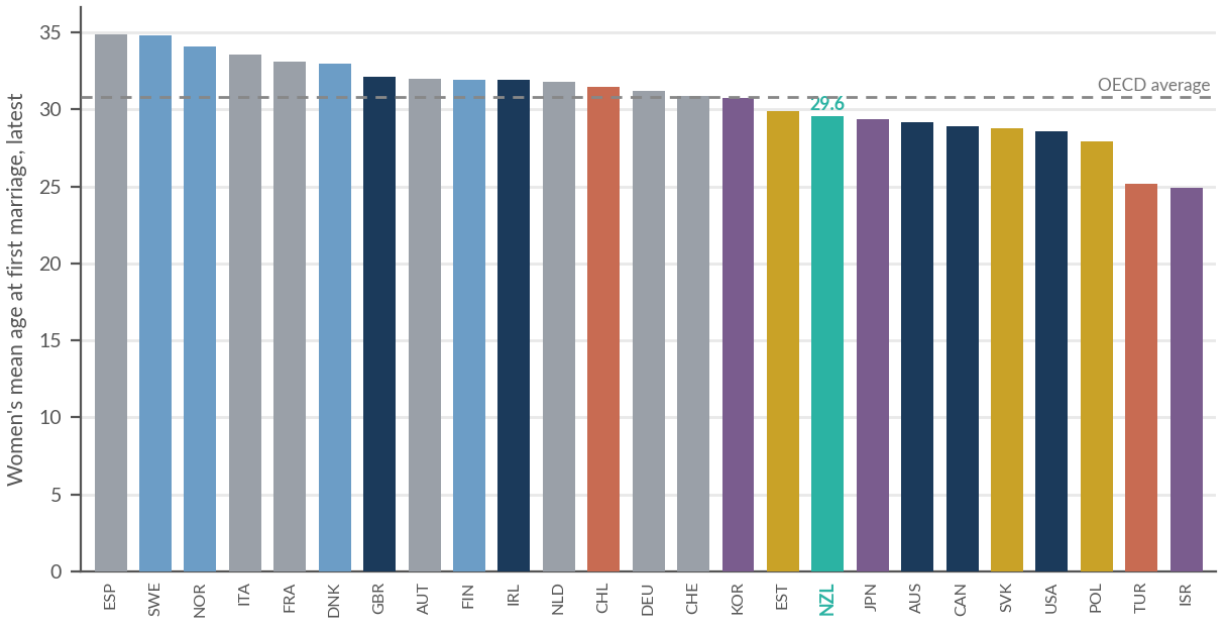
Source: OECD Family Database; UN Demographic Yearbook

New Zealanders marry at a rate of 3.7 per 1,000 people a year, 19th of the 25 countries with comparable data and below the OECD average of 4.3. The most-marrying countries on this chart are Turkey (6.8), the United States (6.2) and Israel (5.5), places where marriage and remarriage remain common, supported by religion or custom. The least are Canada (2.6) and Chile (2.7), with Britain's pandemic-affected 1.4 an oddity at the bottom.

New Zealand's neighbours on the chart are France and Spain, which would have startled the New Zealand of 1970. Then, New Zealand married at 9.2 per 1,000, nearly twice Australia's rate today. The fall since is not a local curiosity: Australia went from 9.3 to 4.9 and the United States from 10.6 to 6.2 over the same half century.

Only the ordering has changed. America remains the great marrying nation of the West, and the Antipodes, once more nuptial than almost anywhere, now sit in the European middle. Marriage has become a choice everywhere; the charts that follow show what replaced it.

2.02 Age at first marriage



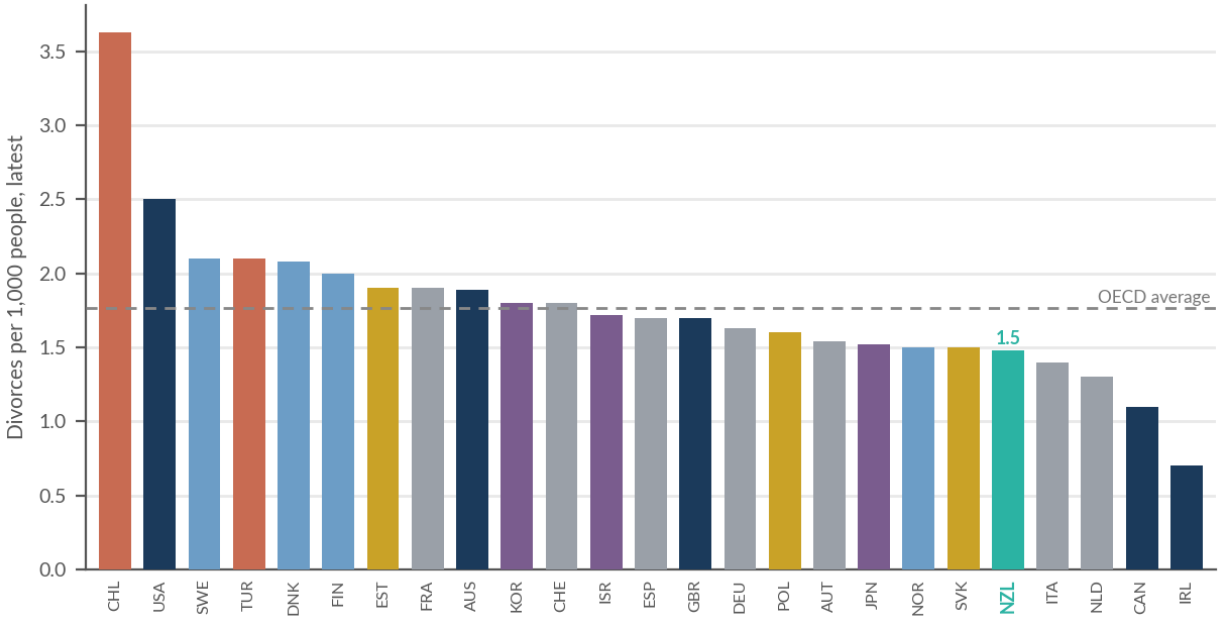
Source: OECD Family Database; UNECE

The New Zealand woman marrying for the first time is 29.6 years old on average, 17th of 25 countries and younger than the OECD average of 30.8. The oldest first-time brides are in Spain and Sweden, at nearly 35, with Norway, Italy and France close behind. The youngest are in Israel (24.9) and Turkey (25.2), and, more surprisingly, the United States (28.6), where earlier marriage survives alongside high rates of it.

The Anglosphere clusters tightly: Australia at 29.2, Canada at 28.9, New Zealand at 29.6, with Britain the outlier at 32.1. New Zealand brides are five years older than in 1990, when the average was 24.5, and the same five-year shift appears in Australia and the United States almost exactly.

Europe shows where the escalator leads. A Spanish or Swedish woman now marries at an age at which her New Zealand counterpart of 1990 might have had three children. Deferred marriage compresses childbearing years, and the fertility chart two pages on shows the arithmetic working through: the countries at the top of this chart mostly sit at the bottom of that one.

2.03 Divorce rate

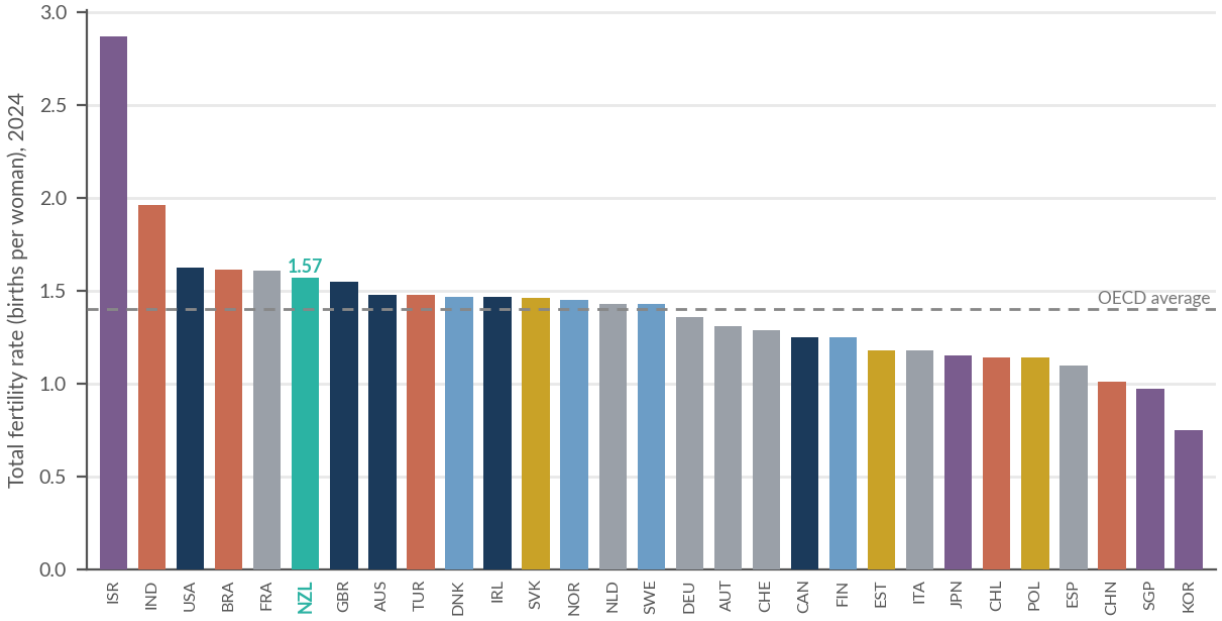


Source: OECD Family Database

New Zealand records 1.5 divorces per 1,000 people a year, 21st of 25 countries and below the OECD average of 1.8. Chile heads the chart at 3.6, a figure best read against divorce being legalised there only in 2004, followed by the United States at 2.5, which marries most and divorces most, a consistency of a kind. At the bottom sit Ireland (0.7), where divorce arrived in 1997, Canada and the Netherlands.

New Zealand's rate has fallen by nearly half since the early 1990s, from 2.7 per 1,000 in 1992. The same decline runs through the whole Anglosphere: America from 4.8 to 2.5, Britain from 2.7 to 1.7, Australia from 2.5 to 1.9. The paradox is only apparent. One likely reason divorce falls where marriage falls is that the couples who still marry are older, better established and freely chosen, while those who once would have married and divorced now cohabit and separate outside the statistics. Low divorce in 2022 does not mean stabler families than 1990; it means the unstable relationships have moved beyond the register's reach. The single-parent chart at 2.07 catches what this one misses.

2.04 Fertility



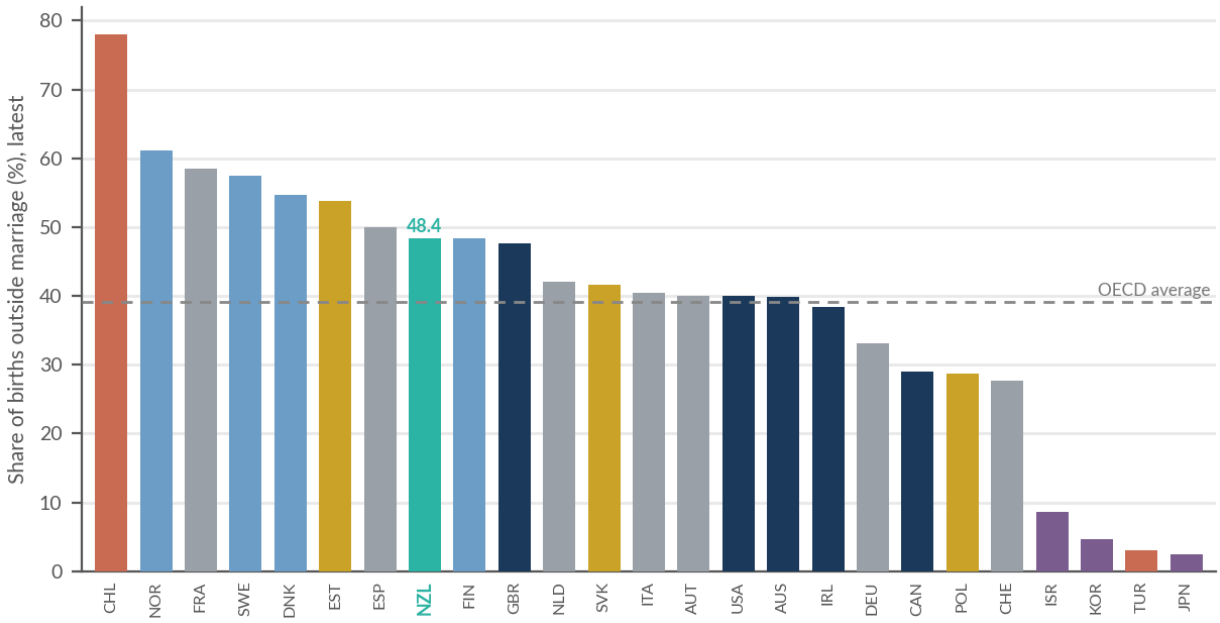
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

New Zealand's total fertility rate of 1.57 births per woman in 2024 ranks sixth of 29, remarkable only because everyone else has fallen further. Israel, at 2.87, is the developed world's great exception, the only rich country above replacement. India, at 1.96, has now slipped below it. Then come the United States (1.63), Brazil and France (1.61), and New Zealand.

The bottom of the chart records something without historical precedent. South Korea's rate of 0.75, if sustained, implies native-born generations far smaller than their parents'. Singapore (0.97) and China (1.01) are barely higher, and Spain, Poland, Chile, Japan, Italy and Estonia all sit below 1.2. Half the countries in this book are on course to halve their native-born populations within two generations, absent migration.

New Zealand's fall from 3.17 in 1970 to 1.57 today matches its peers almost exactly: Australia went from 2.86 to 1.48, Britain from 2.44 to 1.55. Relative position is scant comfort when every country on the chart except Israel sits below replacement. The age structures of Chapter 1 are this chart's future, already visible.

2.05 Births outside marriage



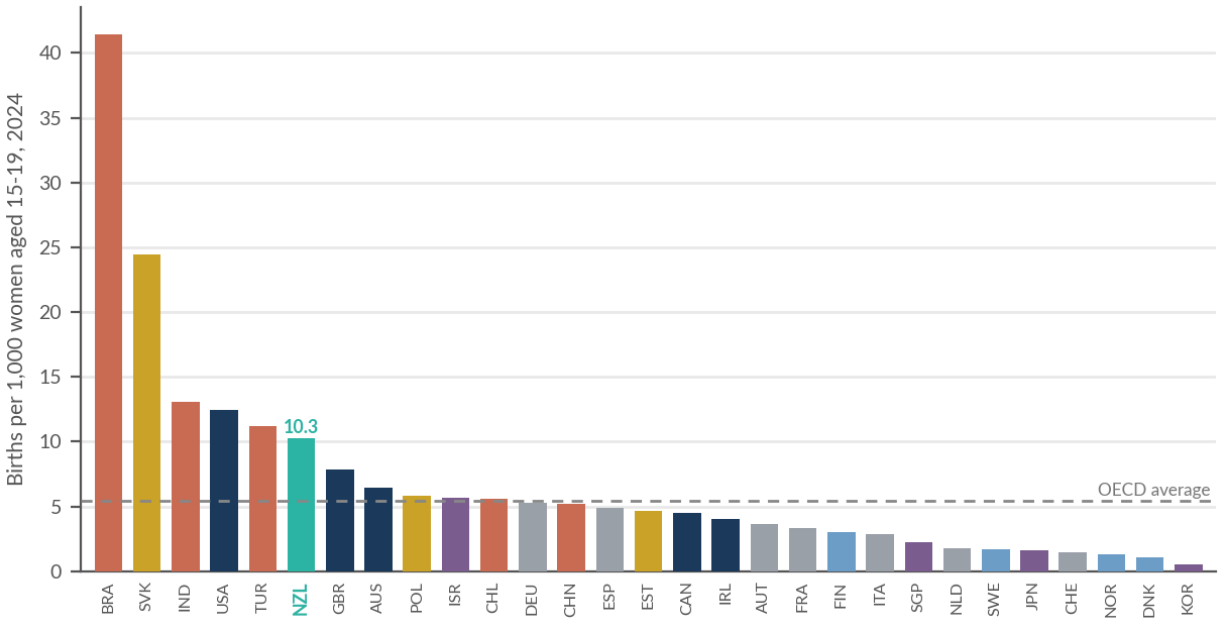
Source: OECD Family Database

In 2024, 48.4% of New Zealand babies were born to unmarried parents, eighth of 25 countries and well above the OECD average of 39.1%. Chile leads at 78.1%, followed by Norway (61.2%), France (58.5%) and Sweden (57.5%). Britain (47.6%) and New Zealand are near twins on this measure; the United States (40.0%) and Australia (39.9%) sit a step lower.

The bottom of the chart is a different civilisation. In Japan just 2.4% of births occur outside marriage, in Turkey 3.1%, in South Korea 4.7% and in Israel 8.6%. In East Asia the taboo has survived even as marriage itself retreats, one reason low marriage rates there translate so directly into low fertility: without marriage, children rarely follow.

In the Nordic countries and France, by contrast, the unmarried birth is simply how stable couples have children, with legal frameworks to match. New Zealand belongs to that world now. The share has risen from 40.7% in 1995 and, as *New Zealand by Numbers* records, most of these children are born to cohabiting parents, not sole mothers. The label ‘ex-nuptial’ describes the paperwork, not the household.

2.06 Teenage mothers



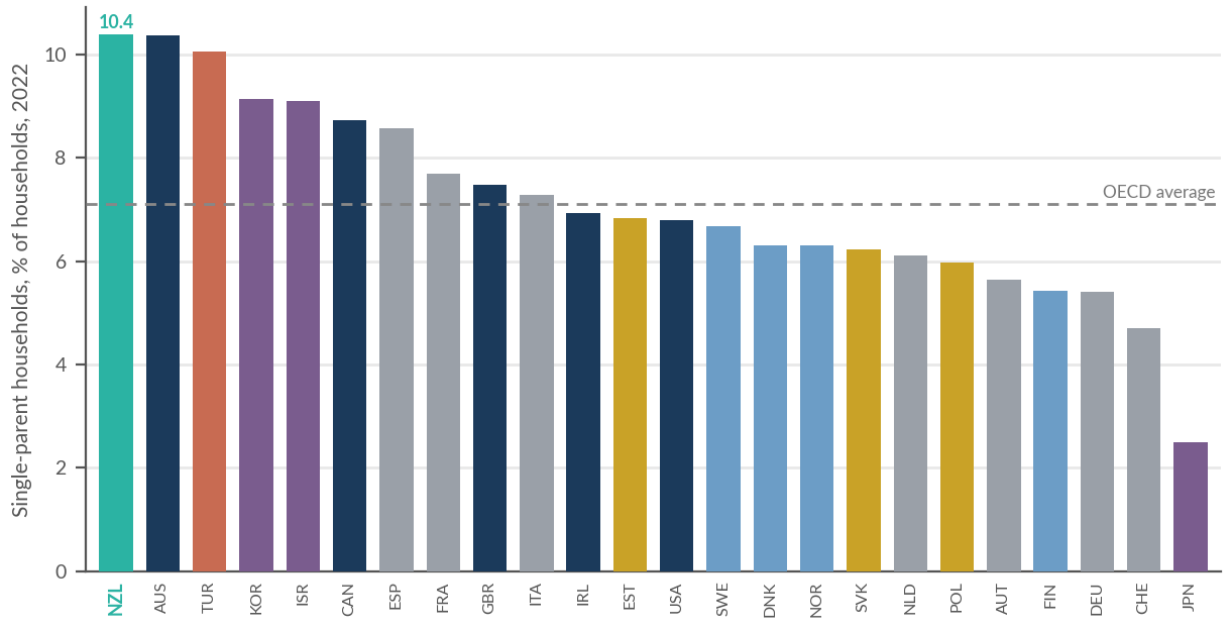
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

For every 1,000 New Zealand women aged 15 to 19 there were 10.3 births in 2024, the sixth-highest rate among the 29 countries and nearly twice the OECD average of 5.4. Brazil (41.5) and Slovakia (24.5) stand far above the rest; the United States (12.4) and Turkey (11.2) sit just above New Zealand. At the other extreme, South Korea records 0.5 births per 1,000 teenagers, Denmark 1.1 and Norway 1.3.

The domestic story is one of genuine triumph, a fall of almost two-thirds since 2000, when the rate was 28.5. But the comparison tempers the celebration: Britain started at almost exactly the same point in 2000 (28.7) and got to 7.8, and the United States fell from 47.5 to 12.4. Everyone improved; New Zealand improved to a still-elevated level.

A teenage birth is associated with sharply narrower options in education and work, which is why this indicator belongs alongside the NEET rate at 7.08. The gap between New Zealand and Northern Europe on this chart is neither geography nor income but the residue of a problem the country has beaten back without yet beating.

2.07 Single-parent families



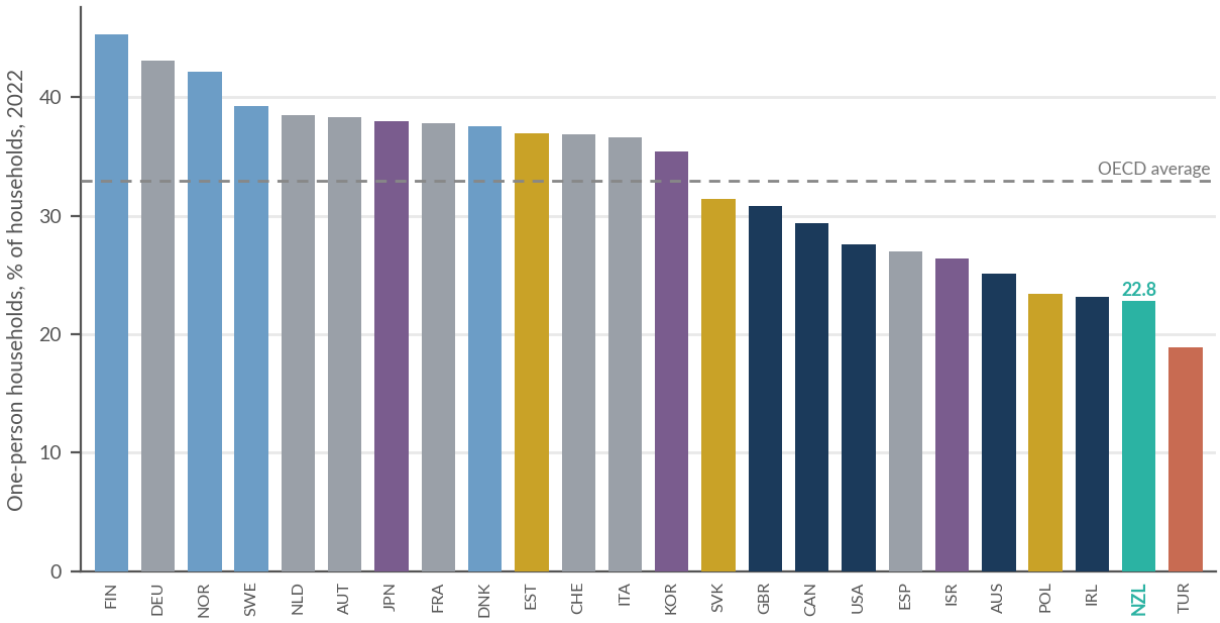
Source: OECD Family Database

No country in this book has a higher share of single-parent households than New Zealand, though the margin is a whisker. At 10.4% of all households in 2022, New Zealand sits level with Australia (10.4%), with Turkey (10.1%), South Korea, Israel and Canada following. The OECD average is 7.1%. At the bottom sit Japan (2.5%), Switzerland (4.7%) and Germany (5.4%).

First place on this chart deserves careful reading rather than alarm. The measure counts households, so countries where lone parents live with grandparents, common in Southern Europe and Asia, record fewer of them. New Zealand's high ranking partly reflects that its lone parents can afford to live independently, or are housed so that they can. Still, the census-based domestic figures point the same way: *New Zealand by Numbers* records 28.2% of families with children having one parent.

The policy weight of the chart lies in its correlations. Sole-parent households face the highest poverty risk of any family type in nearly every OECD country, and New Zealand's child poverty rate at 2.10 sits above the OECD average in part for exactly this reason. Whatever one's view of family structure, a country at the top of this chart carries a heavier social policy load per family than one at the bottom.

2.08 Living alone



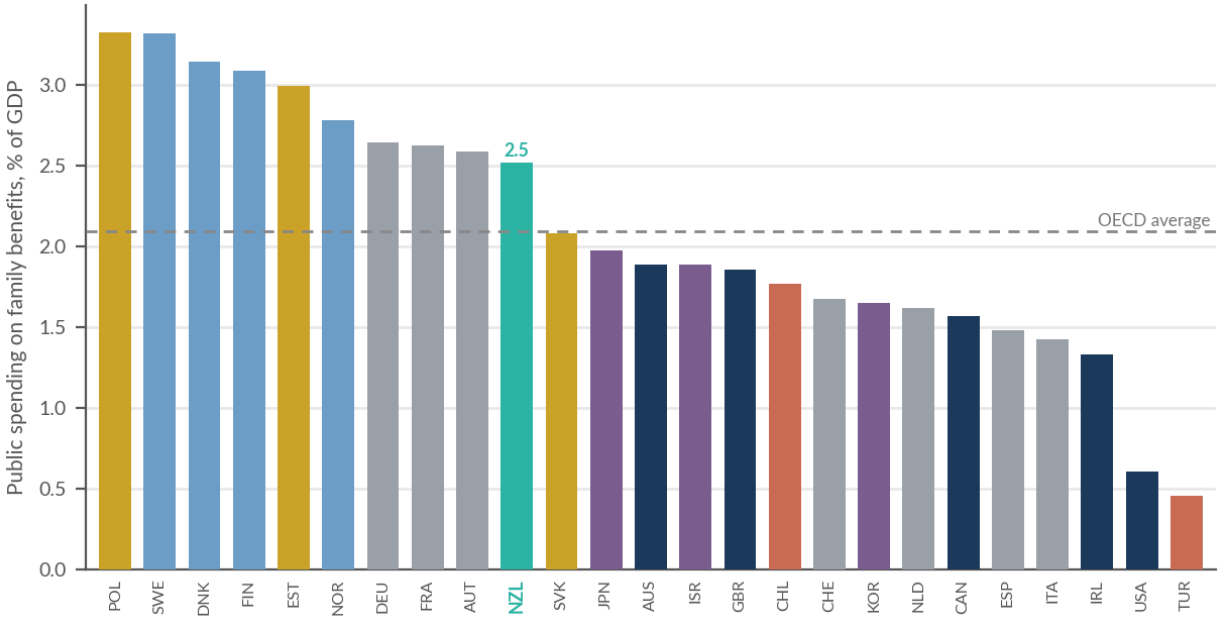
Source: OECD Family Database

Here New Zealand sits near the bottom, and the top belongs to Europe. One-person households make up 22.8% of New Zealand households, 23rd of 24 countries, ahead only of Turkey (18.9%). In Finland the share is 45.3%, in Germany 43.1% and in Norway 42.1%; the OECD average is 33.0%. Living alone is now the single most common household type across most of Northern Europe.

The Anglosphere occupies the lower-middle ground: Britain at 30.8%, Canada at 29.4%, the United States at 27.6%, Australia at 25.1%. New Zealand sits below all of them, the combined effect of a younger population, larger families and, less benignly, housing costs that make solo living a luxury.

The direction of travel is unmistakable across every country on the chart, and New Zealand's own census series shows the share climbing decade by decade. Northern Europe is, in this sense, a preview: an older, richer, more urban New Zealand will look more Finnish. Every percentage point on this chart is a claim on the housing stock, since a person living alone needs a dwelling to themselves, which is why this page belongs beside Chapter 9 as much as here.

2.09 Family support



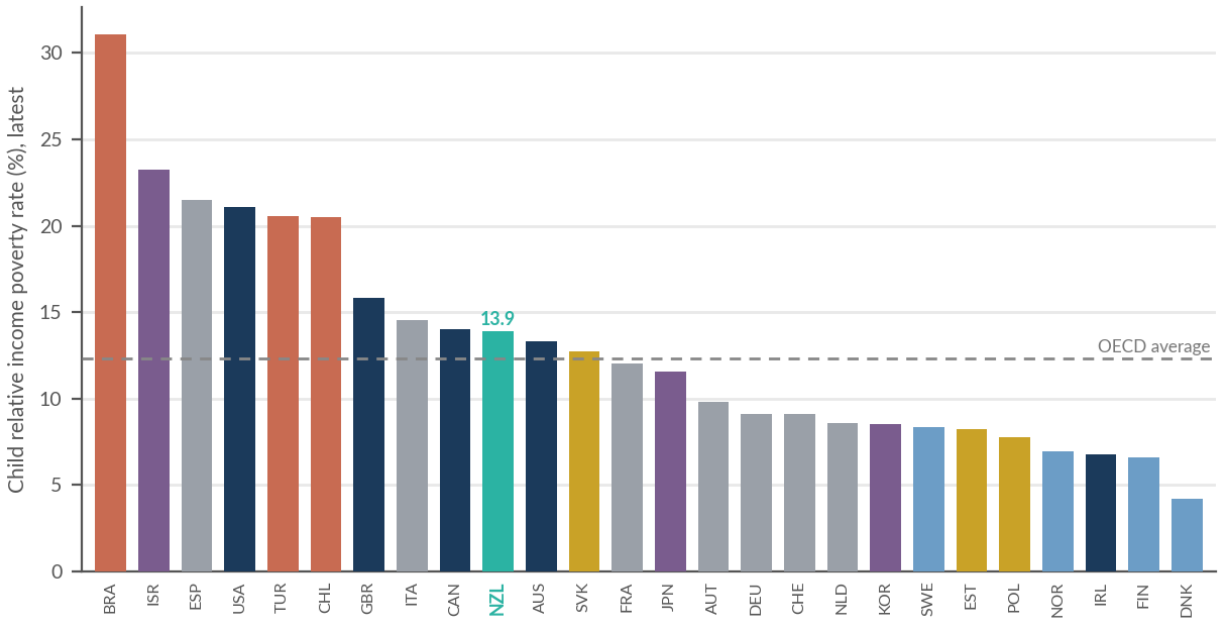
Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX)

New Zealand spends 2.5% of GDP on public family benefits, cash, services and early childhood support combined, tenth of 25 countries and above the OECD average of 2.1%. The big family-support spenders are Poland (3.3%), Sweden (3.3%), Denmark (3.2%) and Finland (3.1%). At the bottom sit the United States (0.6%) and Turkey (0.5%): American family policy runs through the tax code and the labour market, not the benefit system.

New Zealand outspends Australia (1.9%), Britain (1.9%), Canada (1.6%) and Ireland (1.3%) on this measure, which will surprise readers accustomed to Nordic envy. Working for Families, Best Start, paid parental leave and heavily subsidised early childhood education add up to family support of respectable European scale.

Whether the money buys better outcomes is the harder question. Poland's spending is explicitly pronatalist and its fertility rate languishes at 1.14; Sweden's buys the world's most complete childcare system; New Zealand's flows chiefly through tax credits to low and middle income households. The next page raises a design question: whether New Zealand converts that spending into child poverty relief as effectively as the Nordic countries manage.

2.10 Child poverty



Source: OECD Income Distribution Database

On the OECD's harmonised measure, 13.9% of New Zealand children live in households below half the median disposable income, tenth-highest of 26 countries and above the OECD average of 12.4%. Brazil (31.1%), Israel (23.2%), Spain (21.5%) and the United States (21.1%) head the chart. At the other end, Denmark records 4.2%, Finland 6.6% and Ireland 6.8%.

The Nordic countries dominate the low-poverty end for a structural reason: high parental employment, reinforced by transfers and services, does much of the work. New Zealand's 13.9% sits close to Canada (14.0%) and below Britain (15.8%), but far from the Scandinavian benchmark, despite family spending above the OECD average, as the previous page showed.

One caution: this is relative poverty, measured against each country's own median, so it captures inequality among families rather than absolute hardship, and it differs from the suite of measures in New Zealand's Child Poverty Reduction Act. But the relative measure is the one that travels across borders, and it says something uncomfortable: a country that prides itself on being a good place to raise children ranks in the worse half of the developed world for the share of children raised well below the living standards of their own society.

CHAPTER THREE

Health and Mortality

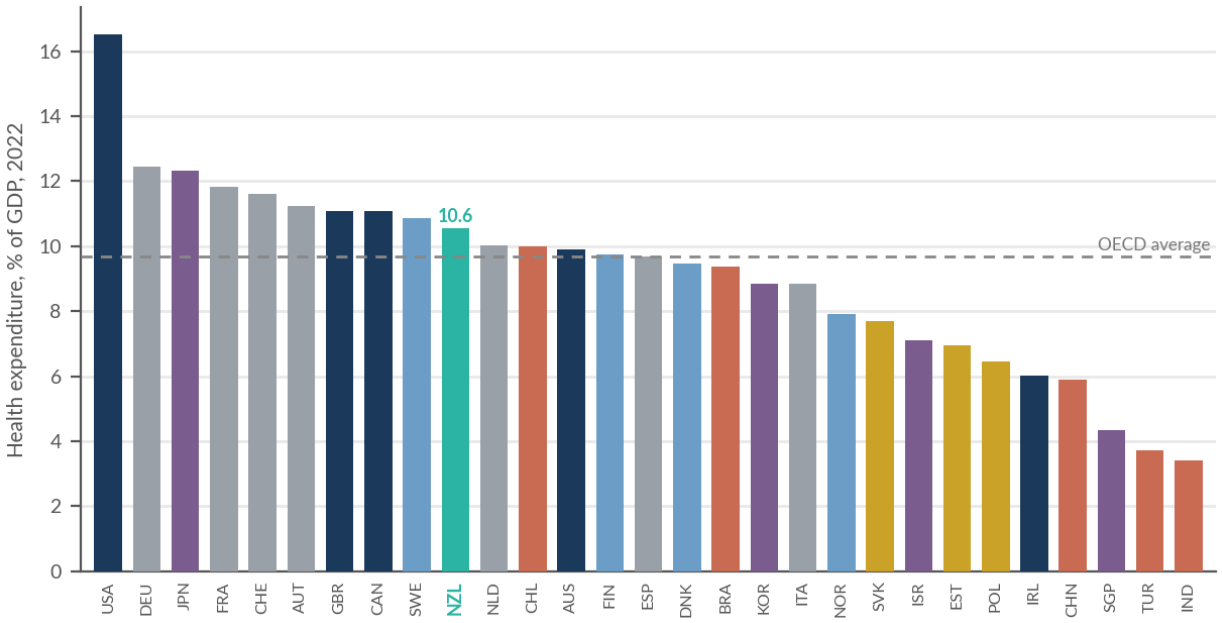
Health is where international comparison cuts deepest, because every country faces the same biology with different systems and different budgets. New Zealand spends more of its income on health than the OECD average, a tenth of GDP, yet runs one of the developed world's leanest hospital systems, with 2.5 beds per 1,000 people against Japan's 12.6. Lean can mean efficient, and it can mean fragile. Both readings appear in this chapter.

The behavioural scoreboard is a study in contrasts. New Zealand has the lowest tobacco use of all 29 countries, the endpoint of a fifty-year public health campaign that succeeded almost completely. It also has the third-highest obesity rate, behind only the United States and Chile. The country that beat smoking has not laid a glove on food, and the same is true, in lesser degree, of every English-speaking country on these charts.

The mortality tables mostly flatter New Zealand less than its self-image expects. Life expectancy, at 82.0 years, sits mid-table, ahead of the United States by three years but behind Australia by one. Suicide, avoidable mortality and infant mortality all cluster around the middle. Road deaths, for all the improvement recorded in *New Zealand by Numbers*, remain the sixth-worst here, nearly double the OECD average and treble Britain's rate.

The chapter's most alarming chart is also its most preventable. New Zealand's first-dose measles immunisation, at 89%, sits near the bottom of the chart, well short of the roughly 95% coverage, with two doses, that measles elimination requires. Some gaps in this chapter cost serious money to close. That one costs far less, though it still demands sustained delivery and trust.

3.01 Health spending



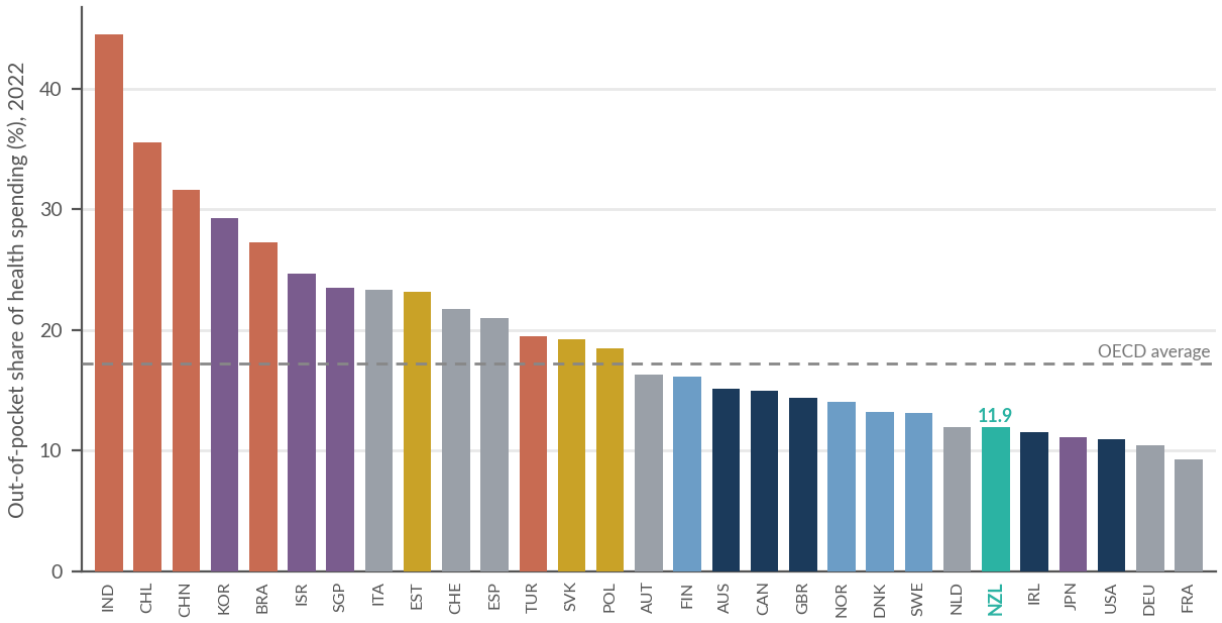
Source: World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database

New Zealand devoted 10.6% of GDP to health in 2022, tenth of 29 countries and nearly a point above the OECD average of 9.7%. The United States remains the world's great outlier at 16.5%, followed by Germany (12.5%), Japan (12.3%) and France (11.8%). At the other end, Singapore delivers first-world outcomes for 4.3% of GDP, and Ireland's 6.0% is flattered by its inflated GDP denominator.

The company New Zealand keeps has changed. In 2000 the country spent 7.5% of GDP on health, close to Australia's 7.6%. Australia now spends 9.9%, noticeably less than New Zealand, while Britain has risen from 7.2% to 11.1%. Health spending has outrun income growth in every rich country; New Zealand's climb of three points of GDP in two decades is close to the pack average.

What the money buys is the theme of the next several pages, and the short answer is: middling outcomes from above-average spending. New Zealand's life expectancy ranks 16th against its 10th place on spending. The gap between those two rankings is the efficiency question every health review circles, and the ageing arithmetic of Chapter 1 guarantees the spending share will keep rising unless something in the system changes.

3.02 Who pays for health



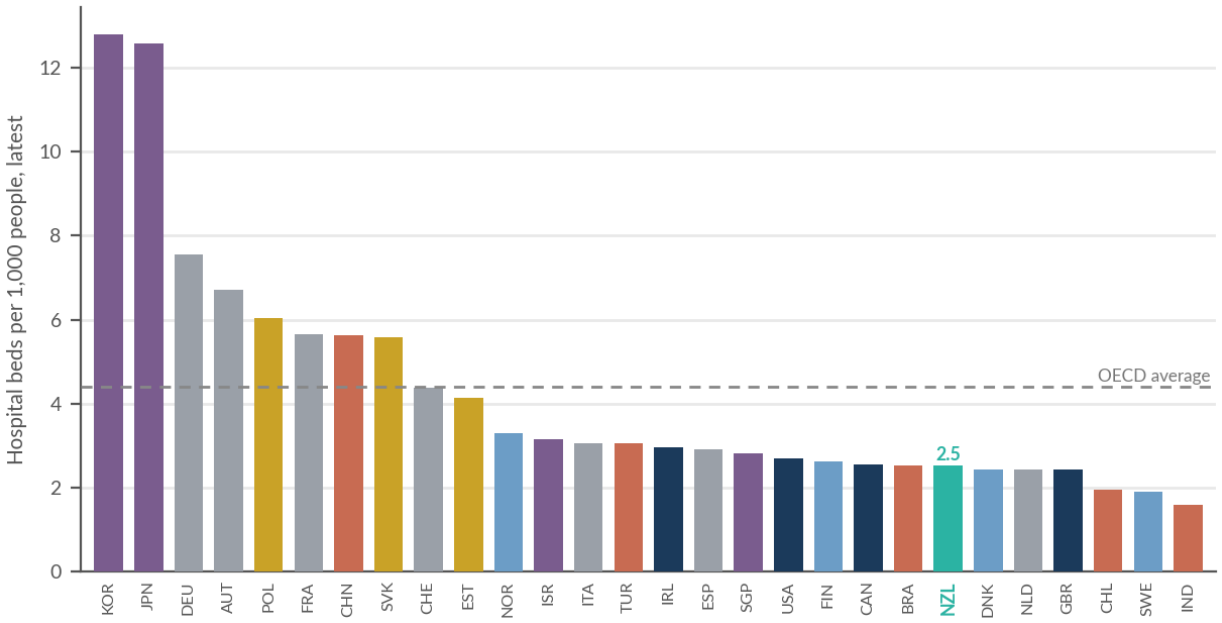
Source: World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database

Of every dollar spent on health in New Zealand, just 12 cents comes directly from patients' pockets, the sixth-lowest out-of-pocket share among the 29 countries and far below the OECD average of 17%. France (9.3%), Germany (10.4%) and the United States (11.0%) are lower still, the last because insurance, public and private, carries almost everything. At the top, Indian households pay 44.5% of health costs directly, Chilean households 35.6% and Chinese households 31.6%.

New Zealand's low figure reflects a system in which the state pays for hospitals and heavily subsidises the rest, with private insurance playing the minor role that *New Zealand by Numbers* documents. Australia's out-of-pocket share, at 15.1%, is a quarter higher than New Zealand's, one reason the cost-of-living comparison with Australia is less one-sided than the wage gap suggests.

Low out-of-pocket costs ease access at the point of care, but the taxes that fund them come from the same pockets, and in tax-funded systems such as New Zealand's, rationing by waiting list creates a different access problem; the social insurance systems of France and Germany buy their low patient charges with mandatory contributions instead. Neither is free. The choice between them is one of the oldest in health policy, and this chart shows where each country has placed its bet.

3.03 Hospital beds



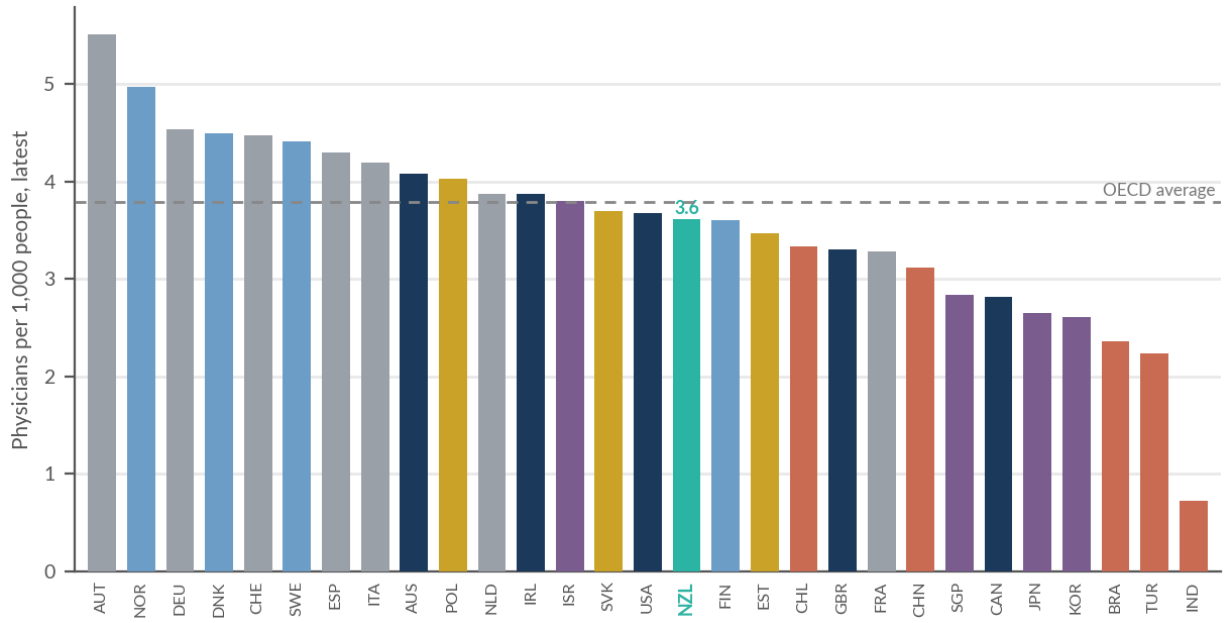
Source: OECD via Our World in Data

New Zealand runs 2.5 hospital beds per 1,000 people, 22nd of 28 countries and little more than half the OECD average of 4.4. The East Asian systems tower over everyone: South Korea keeps 12.8 beds per 1,000 and Japan 12.6, five times New Zealand's ratio. Germany (7.6) and Austria (6.7) lead Europe. Beneath New Zealand sit Denmark, the Netherlands, Britain (all 2.4) and Sweden (1.9).

The lean club is not a poor club. Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden are among the world's best-regarded health systems; they, like New Zealand, replaced bed-days with day surgery, shorter stays and care at home. Nor are the Asian giants' vast bed counts unambiguously good: many function as aged care by another name.

But leanness has a price that only reveals itself under stress. A system at 2.5 beds per 1,000 runs near capacity in an ordinary winter and beyond it in a bad one, and it entered the pandemic with no slack at all. New Zealand's bed count has fallen from 6.2 per 1,000 in 1998, on the same definition-adjusted path as Britain and the United States. The question this chart cannot answer is whether the efficiency dividend was banked or simply spent.

3.04 Doctors and nurses



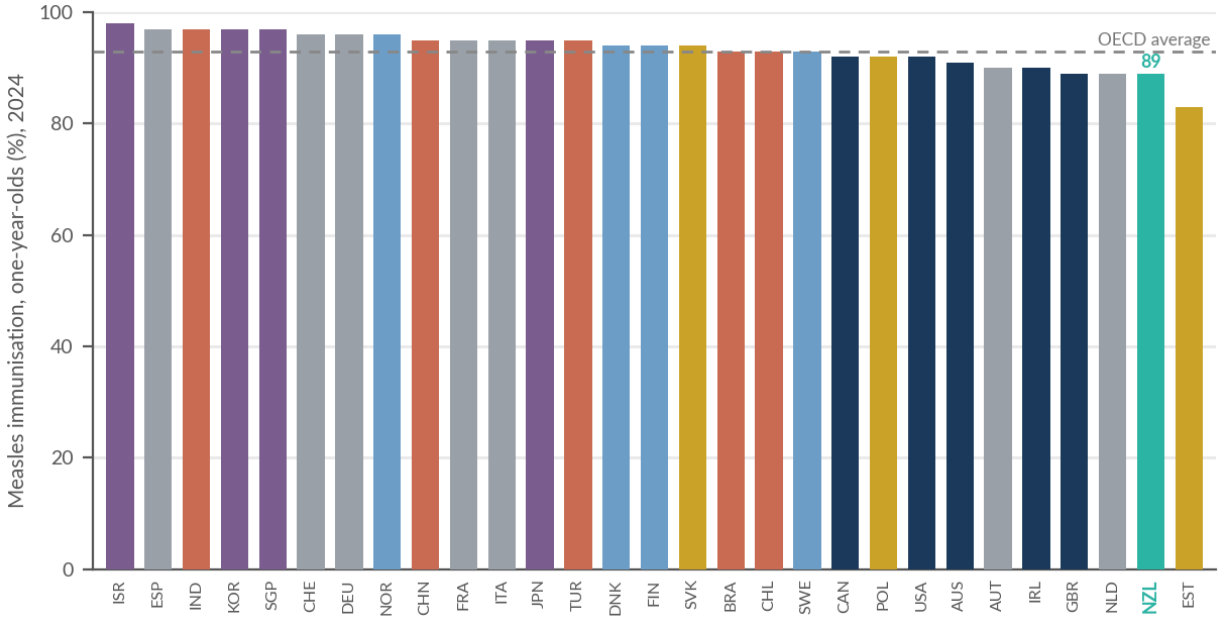
Source: World Bank; WHO; OECD

New Zealand has 3.6 physicians per 1,000 people, 16th of 29 and just below the OECD average of 3.8. Austria (5.5), Norway (5.0) and Germany (4.5) lead the rich world. Australia, at 4.1, keeps about 13% more doctors per head than New Zealand, a gap with an obvious mechanism: the countries are a single labour market for medical staff, and one side of the Tasman pays more.

The familiar complaint that New Zealand trains too few doctors is complicated, though not refuted, by the chart. At 3.6 per 1,000 the country has never had more doctors per head, up from 2.2 in 2000, a two-thirds increase that outpaced the United States and matched Britain's. Nurses tell a similar story, with New Zealand's ratio among the OECD's higher ones. The workforce has grown; demand, and the ageing that drives it, has grown faster.

The instructive outliers are Japan and South Korea, which deliver the world's longest lives with about 2.6 doctors per 1,000, and the United States, which delivers 78.9 years with 3.7. Above a threshold long since passed by every rich country, more doctors are not associated with better health. How the system deploys them, and what people eat, smoke and drive, matters more, as the rest of this chapter shows.

3.05 Immunisation



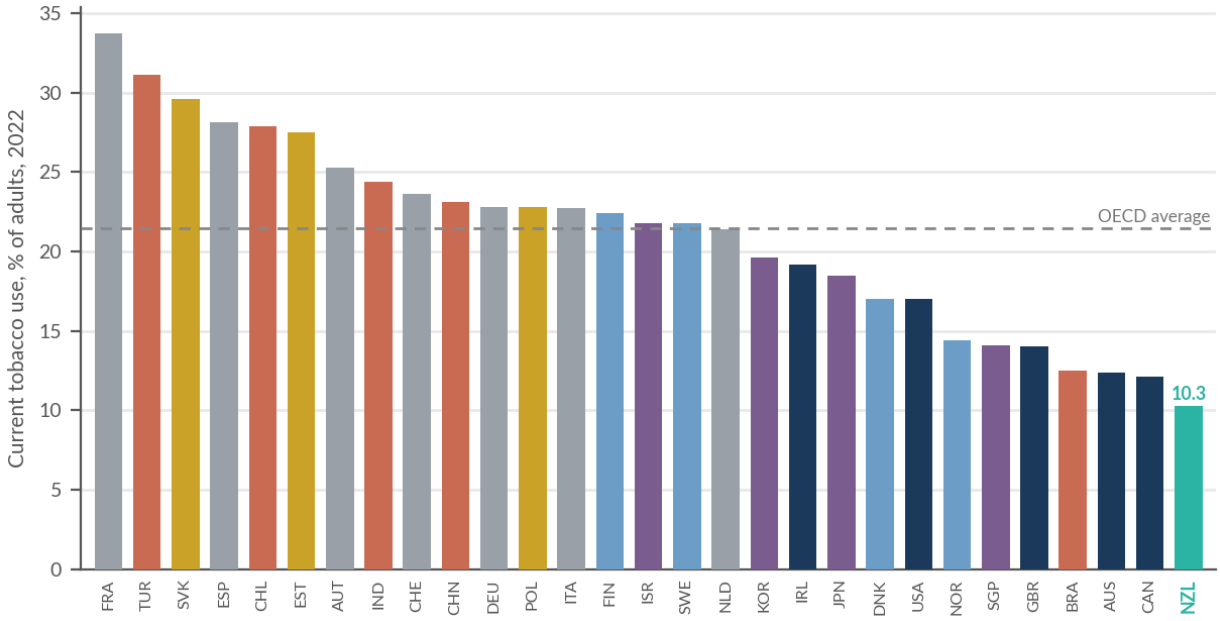
Source: WHO/UNICEF via World Bank

New Zealand immunises 89% of one-year-olds against measles, level with Britain and the Netherlands near the bottom of the chart and ahead only of Estonia (83%). The OECD average is 93%; measles elimination requires roughly 95% coverage, with two doses, in each birth cohort. Israel, Spain, India, South Korea and Singapore all reach 97% or better. India, with a small fraction of New Zealand's health budget per head, protects a larger share of its infants.

Nor is 89% a COVID-era dip on its way back. New Zealand stood at 91% in 2010 and has drifted down since, while the whole Anglosphere slid with it: Australia from 94% to 91%, and the United States stuck at 92%. Vaccine hesitancy, missed catch-up cohorts and patchy delivery are now rich-country diseases, concentrated in exactly the societies with least memory of what measles does.

New Zealand has already paid once, with the 2019 outbreak that hospitalised hundreds, and its health authorities' own target of 95% remains distant. Immunisation is as pure a test as government faces of its ability to do something cheap, proven and universally beneficial. On current evidence, about a fifth of the countries here are failing it, and New Zealand is among them.

3.06 Tobacco



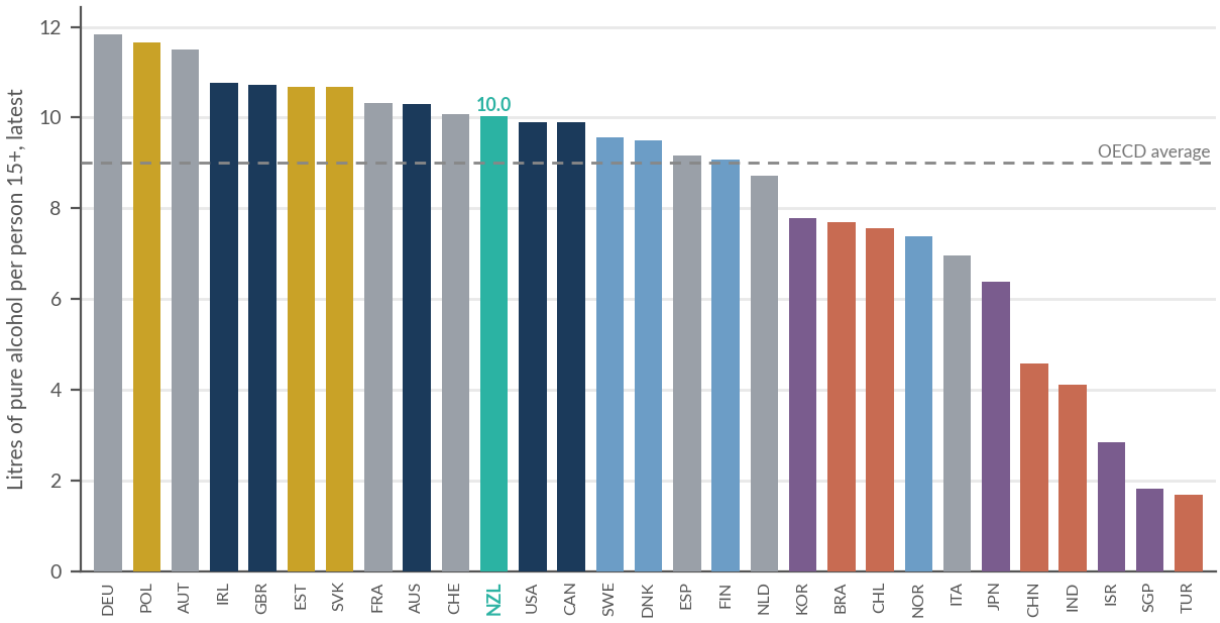
Source: WHO via World Bank

First place at last, and on the right chart. New Zealand's adult tobacco use, at 10.3%, is the lowest of all 29 countries, below Canada (12.1%), Australia (12.4%) and Brazil (12.5%). The OECD average is 21.5%, twice New Zealand's rate. France, at 33.7%, and Turkey, at 31.1%, anchor the other end, and more than half the countries in this book still see over one adult in five using tobacco. These are survey estimates of use rather than tax-paid sales, so illicit tobacco does not escape the count, though where prices and stigma bear down hardest, as in New Zealand, some smokers may be less inclined to admit the habit.

In 2000, 30% of New Zealand adults used tobacco, close to the rich-world norm; the rate has fallen by two-thirds in a generation. Britain fell from 38.2% to 14.0% and the United States from 38.6% to 17.0%, so the direction is universal across the English-speaking world. But New Zealand got furthest, and its final leg coincided with vaping offering smokers a substitute, a harm-reduction turn whose lessons *New Zealand by Numbers* discusses.

The comparison sharpens a point the domestic series cannot. France and New Zealand have near-identical incomes per head and health systems of similar reach, yet France's smoking rate is more than three times New Zealand's. Behaviour is not destiny, and culture, prices and substitutes can move it enormously. That is why the obesity chart at 3.08, where New Zealand sits third-worst, records a challenge rather than a fate.

3.07 Alcohol



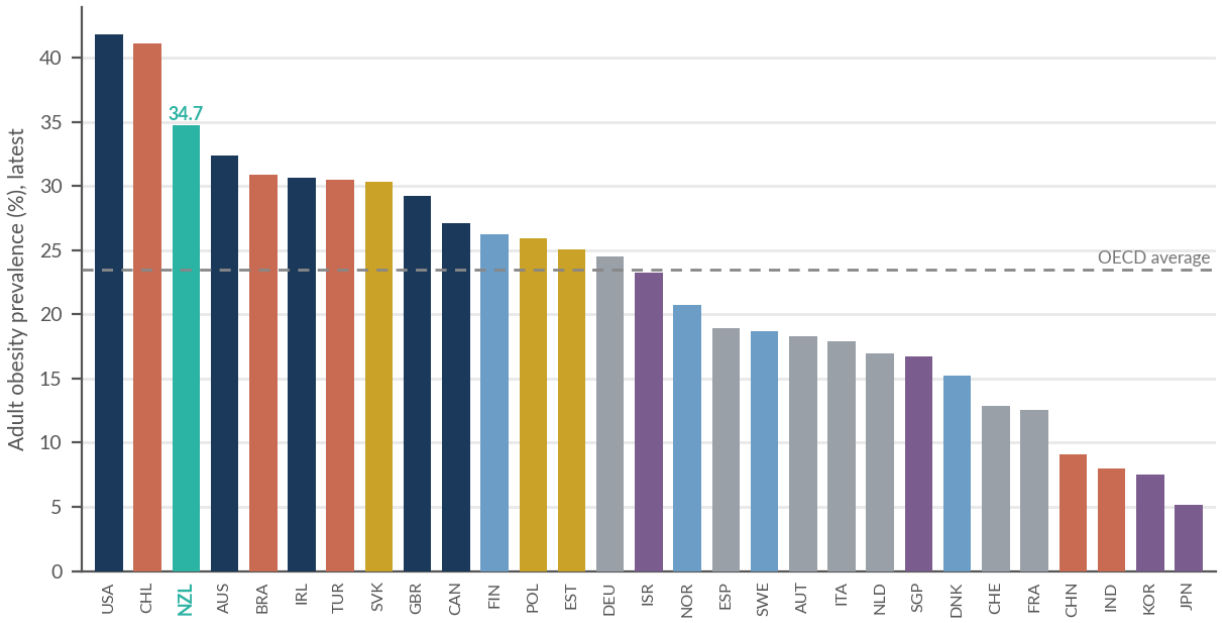
Source: WHO via World Bank

New Zealanders aged 15 and over drink the equivalent of 10.0 litres of pure alcohol a year, 11th of 29 countries and above the OECD average of 9.0. The heaviest drinkers in this book are German (11.8 litres), Polish (11.7) and Austrian (11.5), with Ireland (10.8) and Britain (10.7) upholding Anglo-Celtic tradition just above Australia (10.3) and New Zealand. At the other end, Turkey (1.7), Singapore (1.8) and Israel (2.8) barely register.

New Zealand's figure has barely moved on this measure since 2000, when it stood at 9.8 litres, even as Stats NZ's domestic series records consumption falling to its lowest on record by 2025. The two are reconcilable: the WHO series shown here runs only to 2020 and is built for comparability rather than freshness. The domestic decline is real and recent.

The steadier lesson of the chart is cultural. Wine countries, beer countries and spirits countries have converged towards a rich-world norm of eight to eleven litres, while the Muslim-majority and East Asian countries sit far below. New Zealand drinks like the northern European society it institutionally resembles, neither outlier nor abstainer, and its alcohol harms, like everyone's, concentrate in the heaviest tenth of drinkers rather than the average.

3.08 Obesity



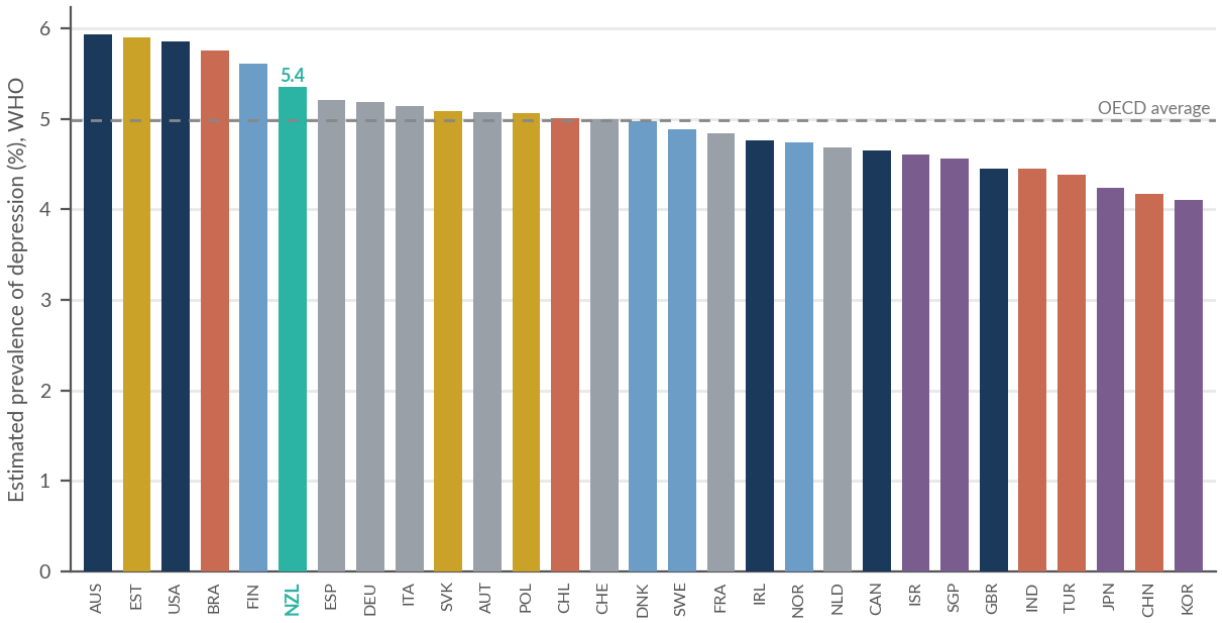
Source: WHO via Our World in Data

More than one New Zealand adult in three, 34.7%, is obese, the third-highest rate among the 29 countries, behind only the United States (41.8%) and Chile (41.1%). Australia (32.4%) is fourth. The OECD average is 23.5%; Japan's rate is 5.2%, South Korea's 7.5% and France's 12.5%. A New Zealander is nearly seven times more likely to be obese than a Japanese.

The trajectory is as bad as the level. New Zealand's rate has risen from 21.8% in 2000, a gain of thirteen percentage points in a generation, and no country on this chart has recorded a sustained decline. The English-speaking countries dominate the top third, which points at shared food environments, car dependence and portion norms rather than anything peculiarly local.

Tobacco use collapsed as changing social attitudes, prices, restrictions and substitutes arrived together; against obesogenic food, no country on this chart has yet achieved a sustained decline, and taxes on food and drink shift purchases more reliably than they shift waistlines. On current trends, obesity will place a growing claim on health services in the 2040s, in New Zealand as everywhere on this chart.

3.09 Mental health



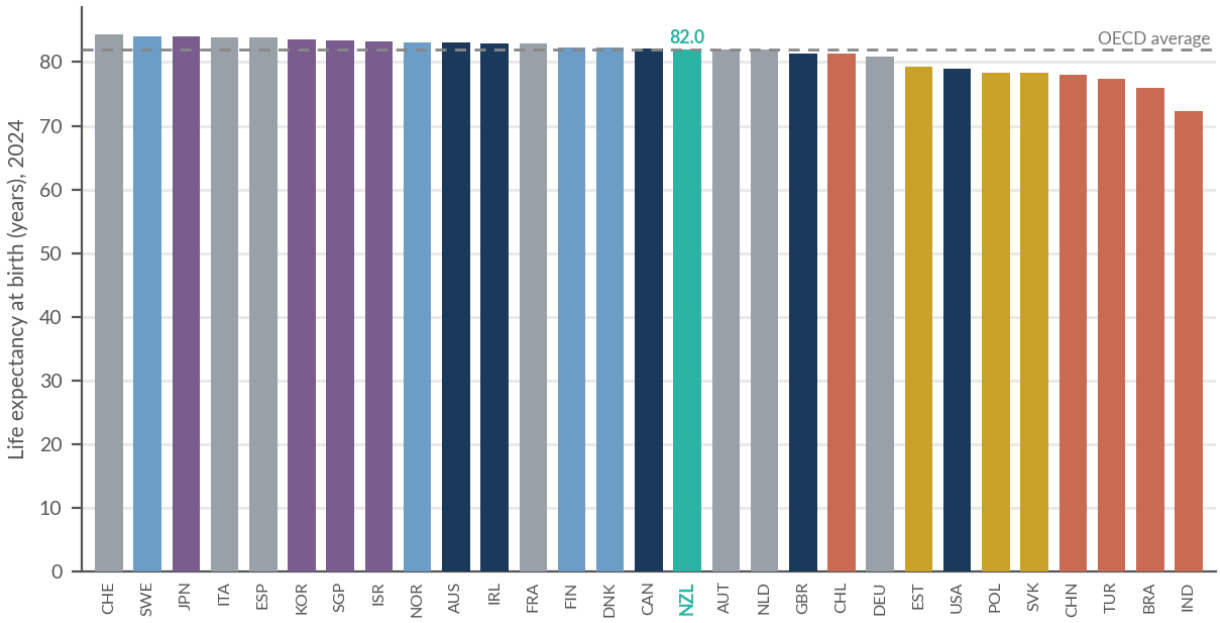
Source: WHO Global Health Observatory

On the WHO's population-based estimates, 5.4% of New Zealanders live with depression, the sixth-highest prevalence among the 29 countries. Australia (5.9%), Estonia (5.9%) and the United States (5.9%) head the chart; South Korea (4.1%), China (4.2%) and Japan (4.2%) record the lowest rates. The full spread, from 4.1% to 5.9%, is strikingly narrow compared with the behavioural charts either side of it.

Two cautions govern this page. The estimates date from 2015, the last WHO harmonised round, and cross-country comparison of mental illness is treacherous: prevalence surveys measure willingness to disclose as much as underlying distress, and East Asia's low numbers surely reflect stigma in some degree. The direction of the domestic evidence since, in New Zealand's case a doubling of measured psychological distress in five years, appears in *New Zealand by Numbers*.

The English-speaking countries cluster at the top of the depression table while reporting the world's highest life satisfaction in Chapter 12. Mental health is the hardest of these indicators to measure well. It is also, on any reading of the numbers, a first-order policy problem in every country here.

3.10 Life expectancy



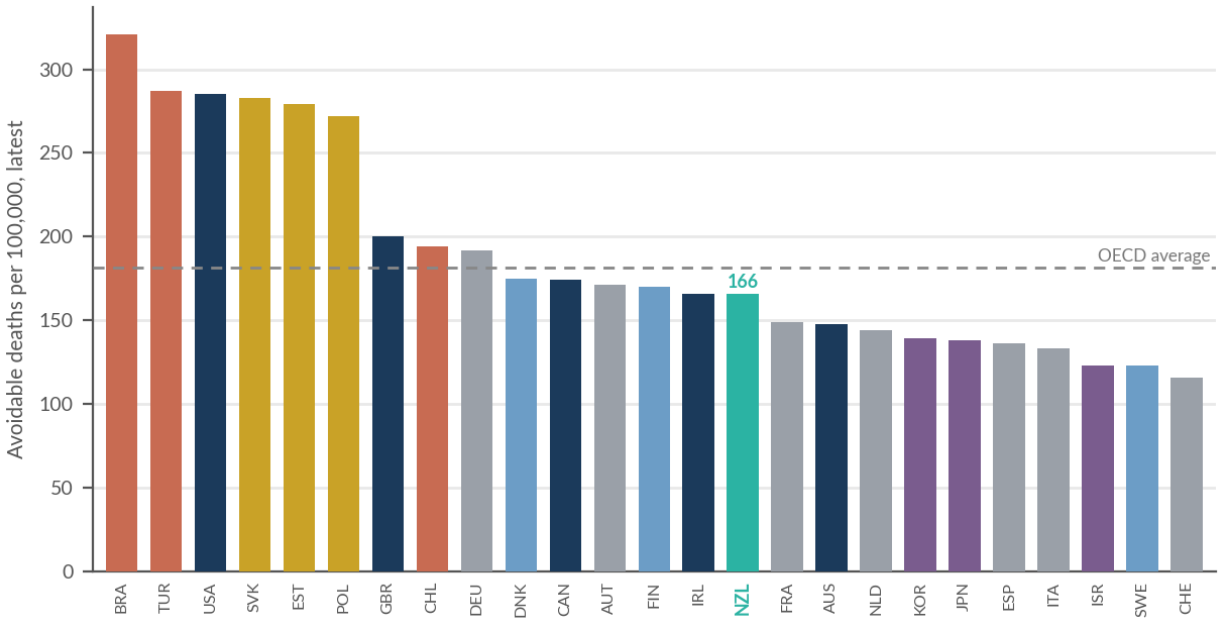
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

A New Zealander born in 2024 can expect to live 82.0 years, a month above the OECD average and 16th of 29 countries. The leaders are Switzerland (84.4), Sweden (84.1), Japan (84.0) and Italy (84.0). Australia, at 83.1, has opened a one-year lead over New Zealand. At the bottom of the rich world sits the United States at 78.9 years, below Chile and barely above China (78.0), a placement no other statistic in this book conveys so bluntly.

The half-century gains are enormous everywhere: New Zealand added 10.7 years from 1970, Australia 12.0, Britain 9.4. But the pack has spread. In 1970 New Zealand, Australia and Britain sat within a year of each other; Australia has since pulled ahead of both, and the American line has bent away from everyone's, five and a half years of life now separating Washington from Zurich.

Mid-table is a respectable but unflattering place for a country that spends above the OECD average on health, as 3.01 records. The gaps to Australia and the leaders trace to familiar causes: obesity, road deaths and the persistent mortality differential between Māori and non-Māori that domestic statistics document. Each is measurable, and none is fixed.

3.11 Avoidable mortality



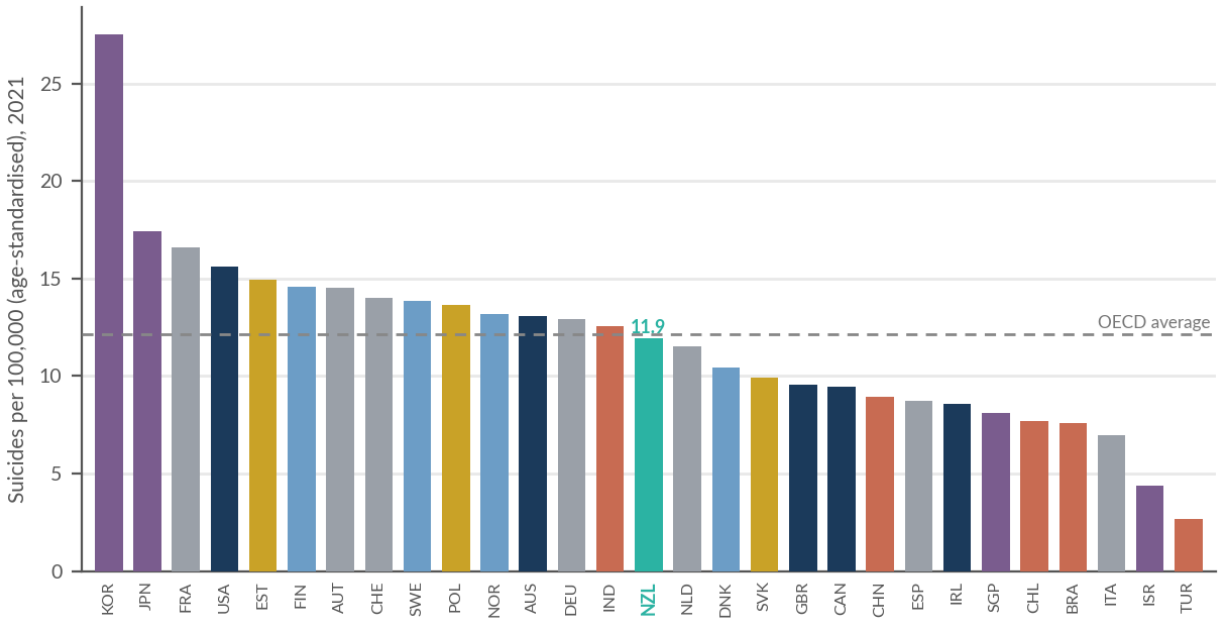
Source: OECD Health Statistics

Avoidable mortality counts deaths before age 75 that prevention or treatment should have stopped. New Zealand records 166 such deaths per 100,000 people, 15th of 25 countries with data and better than the OECD average of 182. Switzerland (116), Sweden (123) and Israel (123) set the standard. The United States, at 285, loses more than twice as many avoidable lives as Switzerland; Brazil (321) and Turkey (287) top the chart.

Australia outperforms again: its 148 beats New Zealand's 166 by about 11%, consistent with its advantages in life expectancy and road deaths. Britain, at 200, now performs distinctly worse than New Zealand on this measure, a reversal of the traditional ordering of the two health systems.

The warning is in the trend. New Zealand's figure has barely moved since 2010, while the United States has deteriorated sharply, from 212 to 285, and Britain from 168 to 200. The English-speaking world's avoidable-death performance is stagnating or worsening even as Southern Europe and East Asia improve. New Zealand's latest data point, from 2020, predates its recent health reforms; the next OECD rounds will judge them.

3.12 Suicide



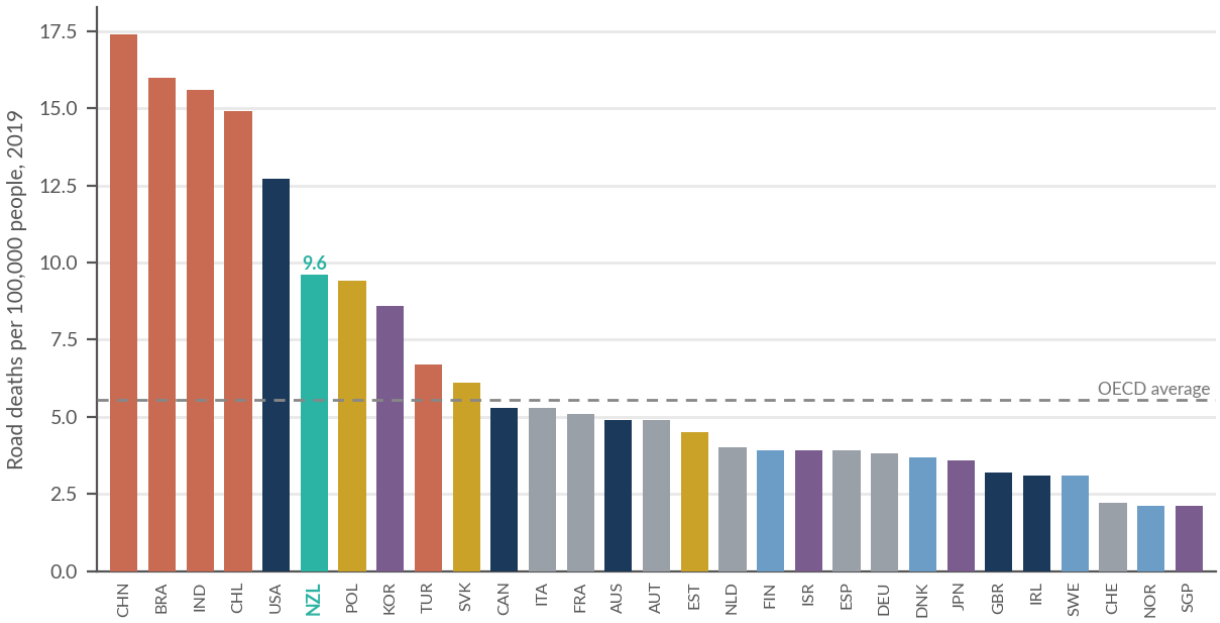
Source: WHO via World Bank

On the WHO's age-standardised measure, New Zealand's suicide rate of 11.9 per 100,000 sits 15th of 29 countries, marginally below the OECD average of 12.2. South Korea's 27.5 is the developed world's tragedy, more than double the OECD average and ten points clear of everyone except Japan (17.4). France (16.6) and the United States (15.6) follow. The lowest rates belong to Turkey (2.7), Israel (4.4) and Italy (7.0), where religion, family structure or reporting conventions hold the figure down; each explanation has its advocates.

Mid-table will surprise New Zealand readers accustomed to grimmer framing, and the reconciliation matters. New Zealand's overall age-standardised rate is unexceptional; what is exceptional, as *New Zealand by Numbers* records, is the youth rate, which has ranked at or near the developed world's worst. The all-ages chart conceals that concentration.

The trend comparison is sobering for the Anglosphere's largest member: the United States rate has risen 40% since 2000, from 11.2, while New Zealand's edged down from 12.6 and Britain's rose modestly from 8.5. Suicide statistics reward caution everywhere, since certification practices differ, but the broad picture is stable: New Zealand's problem is not its aggregate rate. It is who the deaths are.

3.13 Road deaths



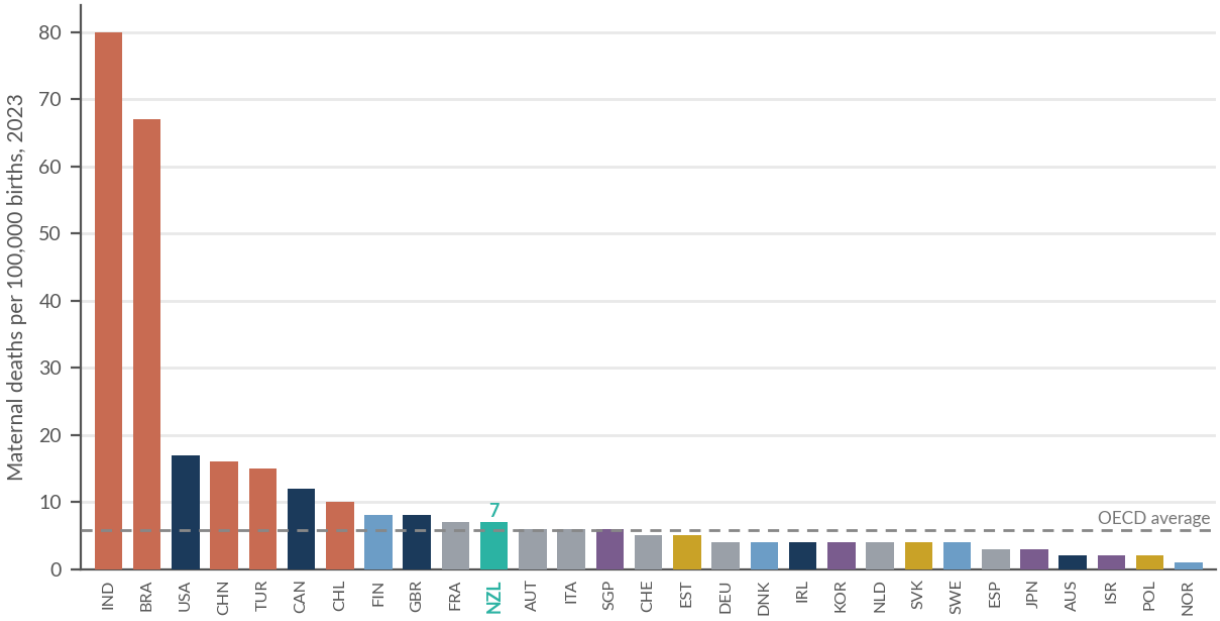
Source: WHO via Our World in Data

New Zealand loses 9.6 people per 100,000 to road crashes a year on the WHO's 2019 comparison, the sixth-worst of 29 countries and nearly double the OECD average of 5.5. Every country above New Zealand is a middle-income economy: China (17.4), Brazil (16.0), India (15.6) and Chile (14.9), plus the United States (12.7), the rich world's standing exception. Norway, Switzerland and Singapore, at about 2.1, lose people at a fifth of New Zealand's rate.

The comparison with kin is the damning one. Australia records 4.9 deaths per 100,000, roughly half New Zealand's rate; Britain 3.2, a third; Sweden 3.1. These are countries with similar cars, similar drink-driving laws and, in Australia's case, longer distances. The gap traces to road engineering, median barriers, enforcement intensity and fleet age, in each of which New Zealand lags.

New Zealand by Numbers celebrates the fall from 843 deaths in 1973 to 272 in 2025, and the celebration stands: the rate here has improved further since this 2019 snapshot. But the ranking has barely moved, because everyone else improved too. On the roads, New Zealand has been getting better and remaining, by rich-world standards, dangerous, both at once, for fifty years.

3.14 Maternal mortality



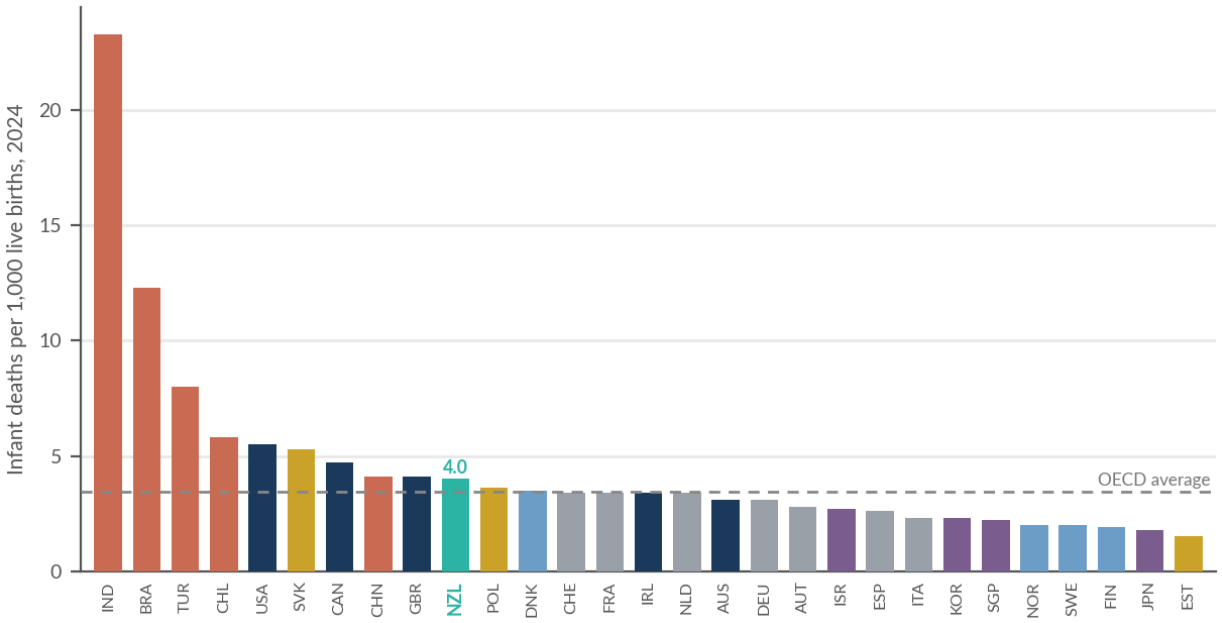
Source: UN MMEIG via World Bank

New Zealand records 7 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, 11th of 29 countries and just above the OECD average of 5.9. The best performers are at or near the vanishing point: Norway records 1, Australia, Israel and Poland 2, Spain and Japan 3. India (80) and Brazil (67) remind the reader what the natural baseline looks like without modern obstetrics.

One rich country refuses to fit. The United States records 17 maternal deaths per 100,000, more than double New Zealand and eight times Australia, and the American figure has risen from 12 since 2000 while nearly everyone else's fell. No single cause explains it; insurance gaps, chronic disease and inequality all appear in the literature.

At these low absolute numbers, small-country figures bounce, as *New Zealand by Numbers* cautions about the domestic series: a couple of deaths move New Zealand several places. The fair summary is that New Zealand sits in the safe rich-world cluster but at its trailing edge, half a century into a decline that has taken childbirth from a leading killer of young women to a rare catastrophe. Australia is already at 2.

3.15 Infant mortality



Source: UN IGME via World Bank

Four of every 1,000 babies born in New Zealand die before their first birthday, the tenth-highest rate of the 29 countries and above the OECD average of 3.5. The safest places ever to be born are Estonia (1.5), Japan (1.8), Finland, Norway and Sweden (all about 2.0). New Zealand's rate is well over twice Estonia's and, more pointedly, nearly a third higher than Australia's 3.1. Britain sits alongside New Zealand at 4.1; the United States, at 5.5, again trails the rich world.

The long fall is one of civilisation's quiet triumphs, in New Zealand from 16.9 per 1,000 in 1970, a decline of 76%. But the same fall happened everywhere, and faster in some places: Australia started worse in 1970, at 17.9, and finished better. Estonia, which in 1990 was a post-Soviet republic with double-digit infant mortality, now leads the world. The gap between New Zealand and the leaders is measured in dozens of deaths a year, concentrated, as the domestic statistics show, among Māori, Pacific and deprived households. Sudden unexpected death in infancy, prematurity and maternal health carry most of the difference. Countries of New Zealand's income have got to 2 per 1,000.

CHAPTER FOUR

Education

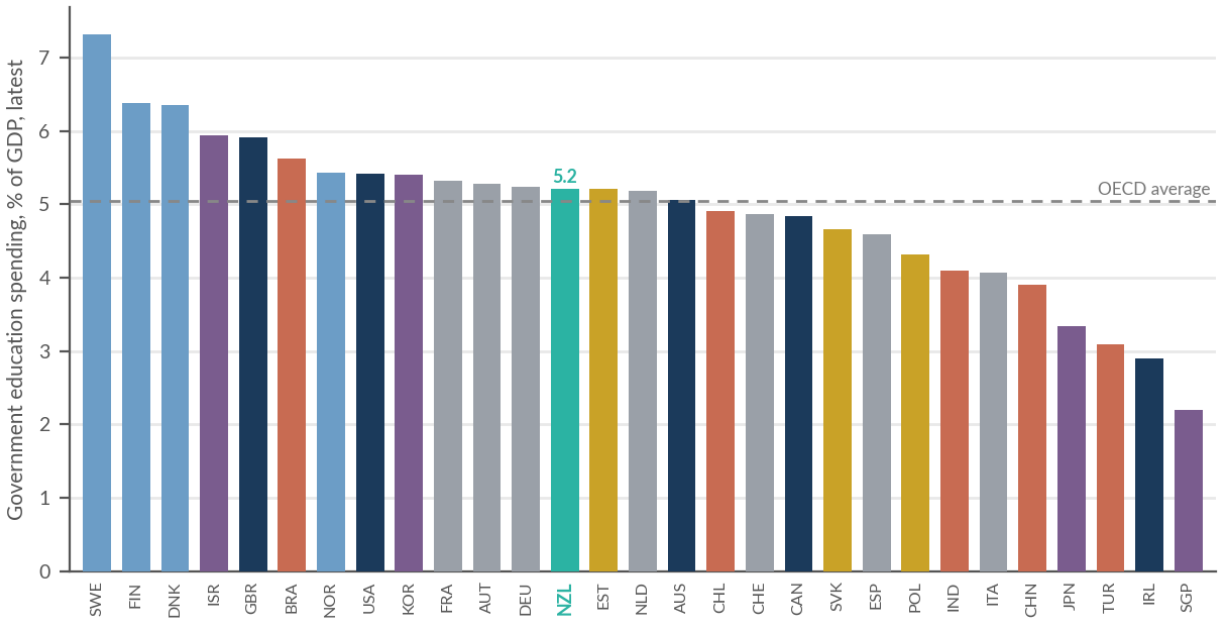
No chapter of *New Zealand by Numbers* carried a bleaker verdict than education, and the international comparison explains why the domestic slide matters so much. Education is a tournament. A school system that holds its own standards steady while others improve still loses, because its graduates compete with everyone's graduates. This chapter measures the tournament.

The results are sobering. New Zealand's 15-year-olds, who in 2000 ranked among the world's best, now score only a shade above the OECD's published average in mathematics, just below the average of this book's own OECD members, and sit mid-way in this book's company, behind Britain, Australia and Poland, and nearly 60 points, roughly three years of learning, behind Japan. New Zealand's adults fare no better on the OECD's skills survey. The inputs, meanwhile, look unremarkable in the best sense: spending, class sizes and teacher ratios all sit near the middle of the pack. New Zealand's education problem does not look like a simple aggregate-resourcing problem.

Two distinctions belong to New Zealand alone. Its students are among the developed world's most frequent truants, with nearly two in five skipping at least a day of school in the fortnight before the PISA test, a habit only Italy, Turkey, Australia and Ireland exceed. And its universities remain among the world's most internationalised, with international students making up 17.6% of tertiary enrolment, sixth-highest here and a reminder that export education remains a national strength.

The chapter's most hopeful chart may be Estonia's line rather than any of New Zealand's. A small, remote country of modest wealth now outscores everyone in Europe, a rise usually credited to the knowledge-rich curriculum and demanding standards it adopted from the 1990s. Small countries can climb this ladder.

4.01 Education spending



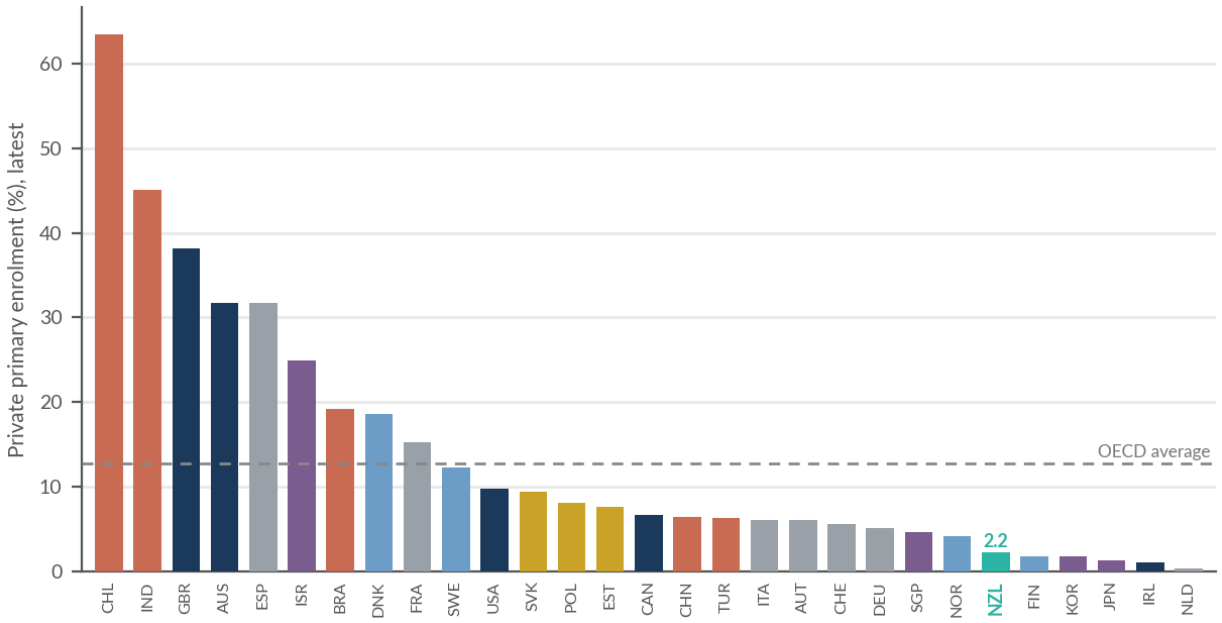
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics

New Zealand's government spends 5.2% of GDP on education, 13th of 29 countries and a shade above the OECD average of 5.1%. The Nordic bloc leads, Sweden at 7.3%, Finland and Denmark at 6.4%, with Israel and Britain close behind at 5.9%. At the bottom sit Singapore (2.2%), whose famously effective schools run on a lean public budget supplemented by intense private tutoring, Ireland (2.9%), flattered again by its GDP denominator, and Japan (3.3%), where families carry much of the load.

New Zealand outspends Australia (5.1%), Canada (4.8%) and Switzerland (4.9%) on this measure, and its share has been broadly stable for a generation, at 5.6% in 2000 against 5.2% now. Britain, by contrast, lifted education spending from 4.0% to 5.9% of GDP over the same period.

Japan spends near the least here and posts the best scores at 4.04; Singapore delivers world-leading results on the chart's smallest budget; Sweden spends the most and scores mid-table. Above a floor every country in this book long ago cleared, what a school system does with money matters far more than how much it gets. New Zealand's results problem, whatever its cause, does not look like underfunding.

4.02 Private schooling



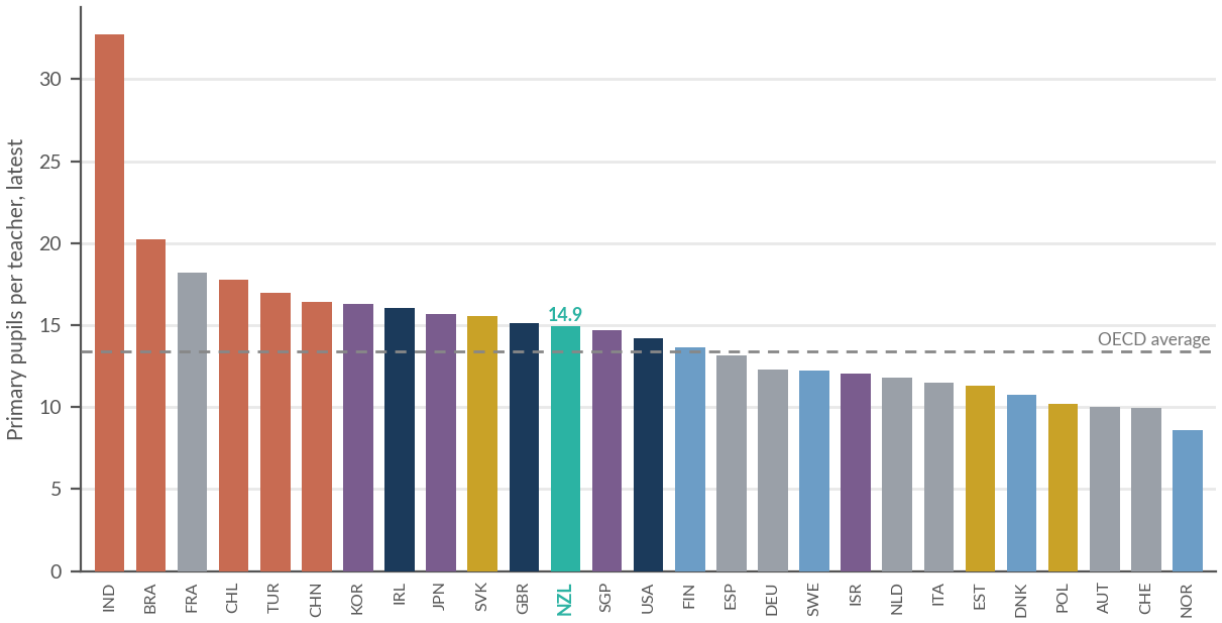
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Just 2.2% of New Zealand primary students attend private schools, 24th of 29 countries and a fraction of the OECD average of 12.8%. Chile, where vouchers built a majority-private system, tops the chart at 63.5%, followed by India (45.1%) and Britain (38.2%), whose figure counts state-funded academies as private institutions. Australia's 31.8% reflects its large Catholic and independent sectors. At the bottom, the Netherlands' 0.3% is a statistical curiosity: most Dutch schools are privately governed but state-funded and count as public.

Definitions do heavy lifting on this chart, and New Zealand's is instructive. Its formerly private, mostly religious schools were integrated into the state system under legislation passed in 1975 and count as public ever since, as *New Zealand by Numbers* explains. Counting them and state-integrated schools together, the privately governed share would be nearer one in seven, closer to Australia in kind if not in scale.

The steadier fact is stability. New Zealand's registered private share was 2.3% in 1996 and 2.2% now; no drift towards private exit has occurred despite two decades of declining public school results. Whether that reflects satisfaction, integration's success or simply the fees is a question the data cannot settle.

4.03 Class sizes



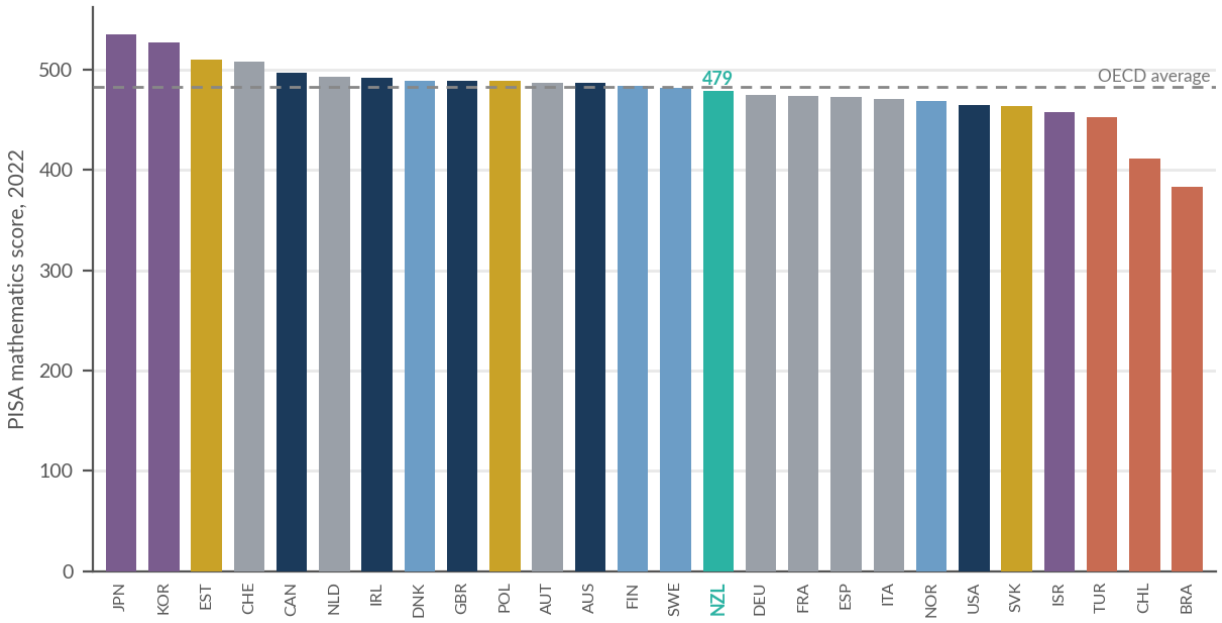
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics

New Zealand's primary schools run at 14.9 pupils per teacher, 12th of 27 countries and slightly above the OECD average of 13.4. The gradient runs from India (32.8) and Brazil (20.2) down through France (18.2) to the small-class club: Norway (8.6), Switzerland (9.9) and Austria (10.0). Britain (15.1) and the United States (14.2) sit beside New Zealand; the comparable international series ends in 2017, so the chart is a snapshot of the late 2010s.

New Zealand has bought substantial class-size reductions over time, from 18.5 pupils per teacher in 2000, a fall of a fifth, almost identical to Britain's. Every rich country on the chart has done the same, because smaller classes are what parents ask for and what teacher unions negotiate.

The evidence for what the purchase achieves is thin, and this book's own charts make the case. Japan and South Korea, at 15.7 and 16.3, run some of the largest classes in the rich world and post its best PISA scores; Norway runs the smallest and scores below New Zealand. Class size is the most expensive lever in education and, on the international evidence, past a sensible threshold one of the least effective. *New Zealand by Numbers* reached the same conclusion from the domestic data.

4.04 PISA



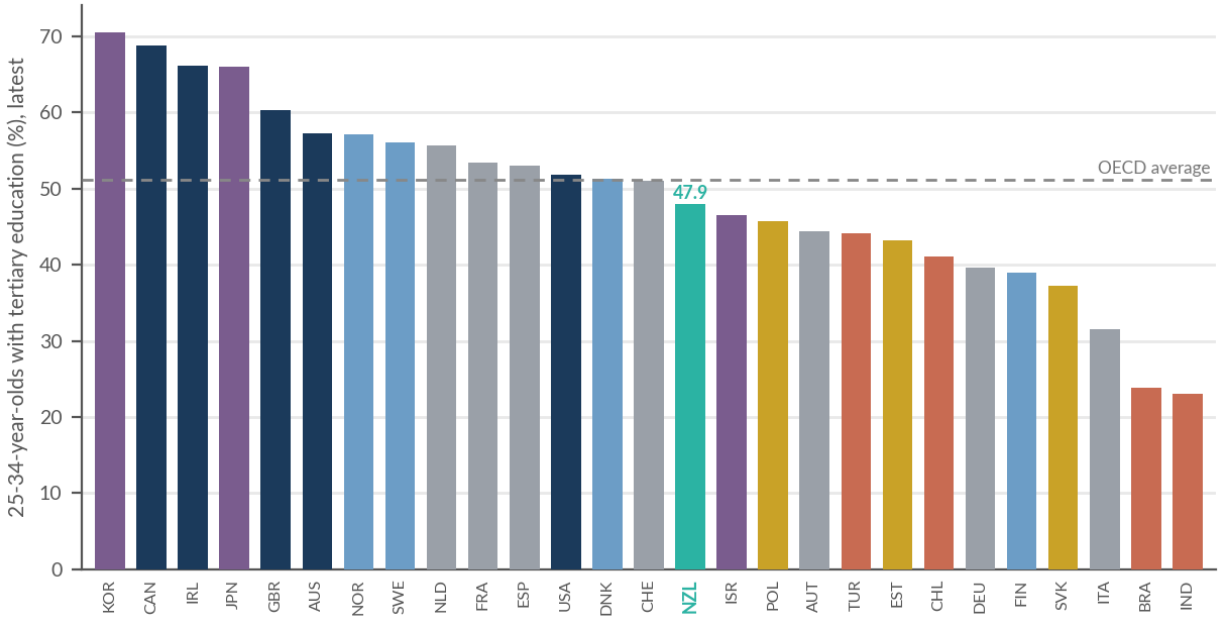
Source: OECD PISA via OECD How's Life

New Zealand's 15-year-olds scored 479 in PISA mathematics in 2022, 15th of the 26 countries with results, below the average of this book's OECD members (482) and only seven points above the OECD's own published mean of 472. Japan (536), South Korea (527) and Estonia (510) lead the countries measured here; Singapore, which outscores them all in the full PISA tables, is absent from the series used. Britain (489), Poland (489) and Australia (487) all outscore New Zealand. The OECD's rule of thumb of roughly 20 points to a school year gives these gaps their meaning: Britain's edge is a term or two, Japan's nearly three years of schooling. In reading and science New Zealand still ranks in the upper third, a genuine remaining strength, but mathematics is where the slide has cut deepest.

New Zealand scored 522 in mathematics in 2006 and has lost 43 points since, a decline only Finland's exceeds among these countries and, at that same yardstick, more than two years of learning. Australia fell 33 points over the same period, Britain 6. Finland's fall of 64 points, from a 2006 score of 548 that made it the world's classroom, is the chart's other cautionary tale: reputations lag results by a decade.

Estonia is the counter-example that forbids excuses. Small, peripheral and far poorer than New Zealand, it scored 510 in 2022 having barely moved since 2006. Curriculum, teaching practice and expectations, not size, wealth or distance, separate the top of this chart from the middle. New Zealand's reforms of the mid-2020s are a bet that the slide can be reversed; the 2025 PISA round, due in late 2026, will provide the first evidence.

4.05 Tertiary attainment



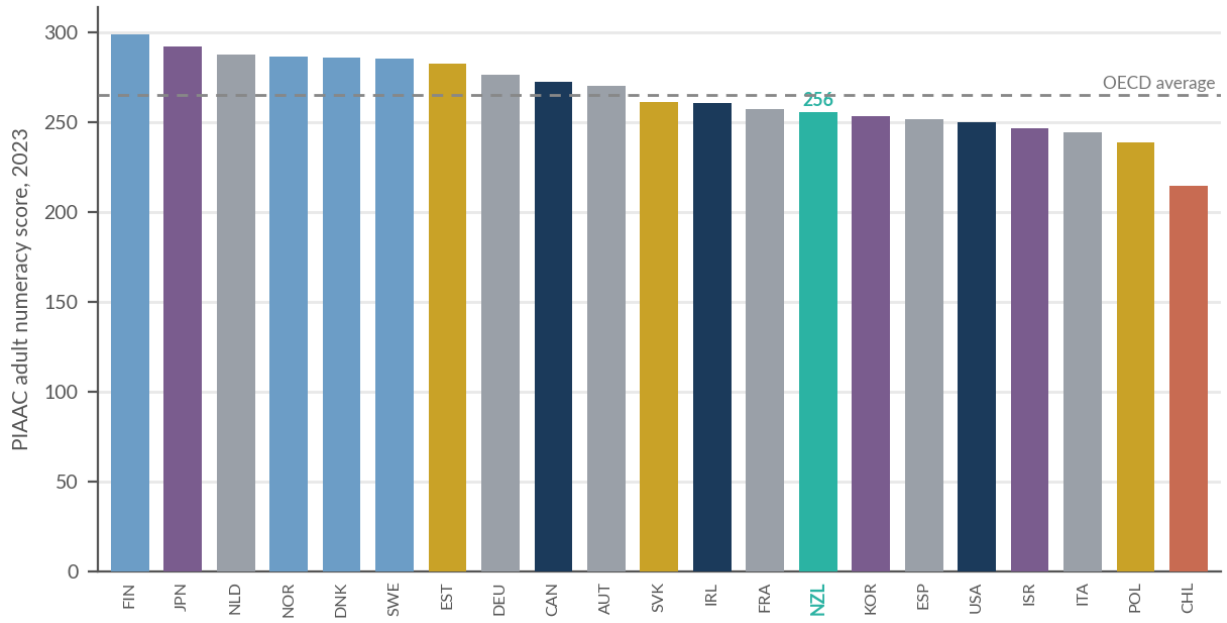
Source: OECD Education at a Glance

Among New Zealanders aged 25 to 34, 47.9% hold a tertiary qualification, 15th of 27 countries and below the OECD average of 51.2%. South Korea leads at 70.6%, followed by Canada (68.9%), Ireland (66.2%) and Japan (66.0%). Britain (60.3%) and Australia (57.2%) are well ahead of New Zealand; Germany (39.6%), whose apprenticeship system routes talent around universities rather than through them, sits near the bottom of the rich world by design rather than failure.

The gap to the Anglosphere has widened. In 2014 New Zealand stood at 40.4%; the seven-point gain since is real, but Australia and Britain gained faster from higher bases. Meanwhile the value of the credential itself varies enormously across the chart: South Korea's 70.6% coexists with chronic graduate underemployment, while Germany's 39.6% coexists with the rich world's most respected technical workforce.

Attainment measures certificates, not skills, and the next page measures skills directly, with unflattering results for several high-attainment countries. New Zealand's middling attainment would matter less if its adult skills ranked higher. They do not.

4.06 Adult skills



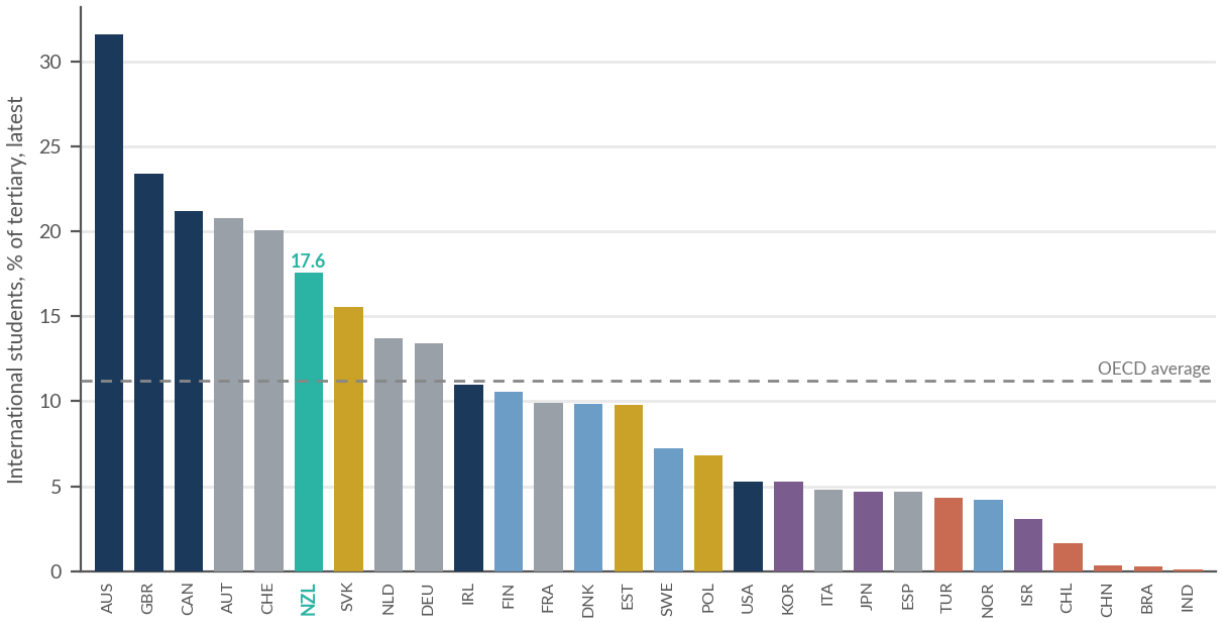
Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) via OECD How's Life

The OECD's Survey of Adult Skills tests what adults can actually do with numbers and text, and it is the reality check on the previous page's credentials. New Zealand's adult numeracy score of 256 ranks 14th of the 21 countries that took the 2023 survey, below the group average of 265. Finland (299), Japan (292) and the Netherlands (288) lead. Chile (214), Poland (239) and Italy (245) trail. New Zealand's literacy score, at 260, reads the same way.

Ireland and Canada rank near the top for degrees and beneath the leaders for skills; Germany ranks low for degrees and high for skills. Credential inflation is measurable: across the OECD, tertiary attainment has soared while measured adult skills have, on average, fallen between survey rounds.

For New Zealand the finding is uncomfortable. A country whose economic strategy leans on skilled migration and a knowledge economy tests as middling on the knowledge its adults hold. The school results at 4.04 feed this chart with a twenty-year lag, which means the 2022 PISA cohort's decline is still to arrive here. What the survey measures, the labour market prices, as Chapter 7's wage chart shows.

4.07 International students



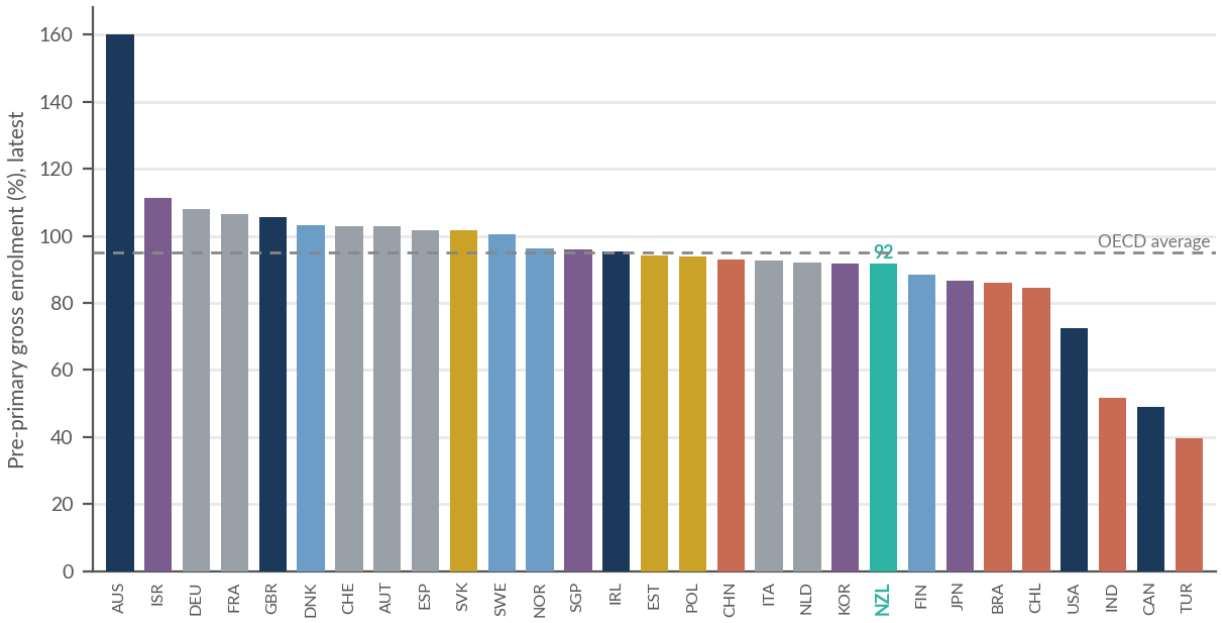
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

International students make up 17.6% of New Zealand's tertiary enrolment, the sixth-highest share of 28 countries and half as much again as the OECD average of 11.2%. Australia leads the world at 31.6%, nearly one student in three, followed by Britain (23.4%), Canada (21.2%), Austria and Switzerland (both about 20%). The giants educate their own: China, Brazil and India all round to zero on this measure, and the United States, despite hosting the largest absolute number, sits at 5.3%.

Export education is thus an English-speaking speciality, and within it New Zealand runs the boutique operation: high share, modest absolute numbers, heavy dependence on a few source countries. The pandemic tested the model. New Zealand's share fell from 20.8% in 2019 to 17.6% now, among the few major exporters yet to regain its pre-COVID share, while Australia pushed on from 28.4% to 31.6% and Britain from 18.7% to 23.4%.

The chart also measures exposure. A sector that is one-sixth international is one-sixth hostage to visa policy, exchange rates and geopolitics, as the border closure proved at a cost *New Zealand by Numbers* puts at $3 billion a year. The revenue is real, the vulnerability equally so, and Australia's current debate about capping the trade shows the politics arriving.

4.08 Early childhood education



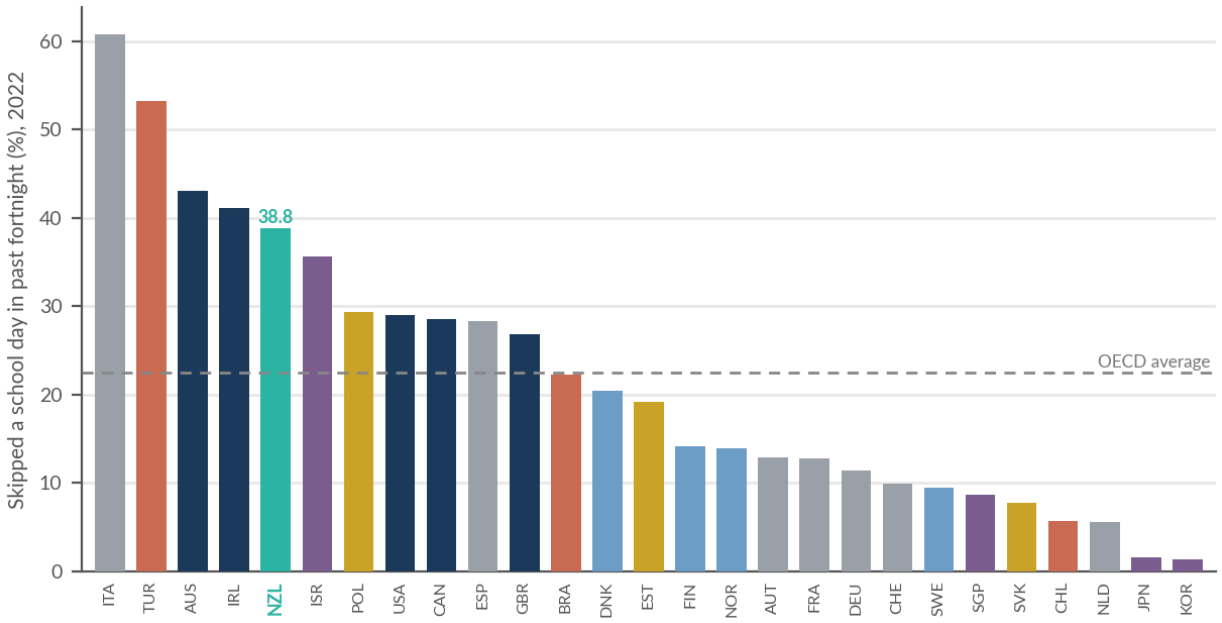
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics

On the international gross enrolment measure, 92% of New Zealand children of pre-primary age participate in early childhood education, 21st of 29 countries and a few points below the OECD norm; the ratio can exceed 100% where enrolments include children outside the standard age band, as Australia's improbable 160% attests. The meaningful divide on the chart lies lower: the United States at 72%, Canada at 49% and Turkey at 40% leave large minorities of children outside formal early learning altogether.

Europe has effectively universalised the pre-school years. France, Germany, Britain, Denmark and Spain all record full participation, most with legal entitlements from age three. New Zealand's participation, as the domestic statistics in *New Zealand by Numbers* confirm, is near-universal in the year before school, at 96.8% on the Ministry of Education's prior-participation measure.

The frontier issue is no longer whether children attend but what attendance buys. The evidence that quality early education pays off, particularly for disadvantaged children, is among the strongest in social policy; the evidence that quantity alone does so is weak. New Zealand spends heavily here, as 2.09 recorded. The unanswered question, in New Zealand as everywhere on this chart, is whether the hours are good ones.

4.09 Skipping school



Source: OECD PISA 2022

PISA asks students whether they skipped a whole day of school in the two weeks before the test. In New Zealand, 38.8% said yes, the fifth-highest rate of 27 countries and well above the OECD average of 22.4%. Only Italy (60.8%), Turkey (53.2%), Australia (43.0%) and Ireland (41.1%) exceed it. At the other end, truancy barely exists in East Asia: 1.4% in South Korea, 1.6% in Japan, with the Netherlands (5.6%) and Slovakia (7.8%) close behind.

The Anglosphere-wide pattern absolves New Zealand of nothing but explains something. Australia, Ireland, the United States, Canada and Britain all sit above the OECD average, which points to a shared cultural drift in how school attendance is regarded, the same drift *New Zealand by Numbers* documents domestically in the fall of regular attendance from 69.5% to 39.9% between 2015 and 2022.

The cost is not hypothetical. Attendance predicts achievement within every country, and the ordering of this chart loosely mirrors the inverse of the PISA table five pages back: the countries whose students show up are, by and large, the countries whose students can do mathematics. A school system cannot teach children who are not there, in any language, in any hemisphere.

CHAPTER FIVE

Crime and Justice

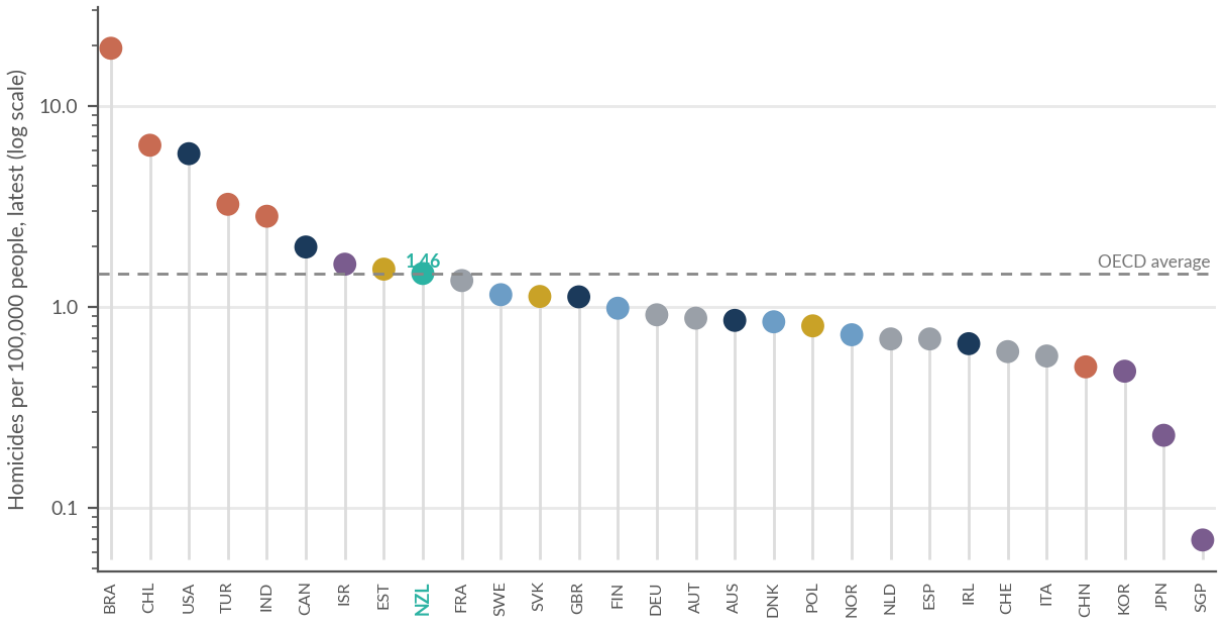
This chapter is deliberately short, and the reason deserves a page of its own. Recorded crime cannot be compared across countries. What counts as an assault, whether victims report it and how police record it differ so much between jurisdictions that a league table of burglary or violence would measure paperwork, not danger. *New Zealand by Numbers* warned that even one country's crime statistics resist comparison across a 2014 methods change; between countries, the problem is worse by an order of magnitude.

What survives that filter is here: homicide, which is counted everywhere because a body is hard to ignore; imprisonment, which is an administrative fact; the share of prisoners still awaiting trial; police numbers; and how safe people say they feel. Five indicators, each solid, and together they sketch a country stranger than its self-image.

New Zealand is a low-homicide, high-imprisonment country. Its murder rate sits below Canada's and just above France's, yet it locks up 211 people per 100,000, the sixth-highest rate in this book, above every European country and more than six times Japan's. Two of every five of those prisoners have not been sentenced. Meanwhile, New Zealanders report feeling less safe walking at night than the residents of 22 of the 26 countries surveyed, including Americans, whose homicide rate is four times higher.

Low in homicide, subjectively anxious, unusually punitive: the three findings run through the whole chapter, and none of the three tracks the underlying violence very closely.

5.01 Homicide



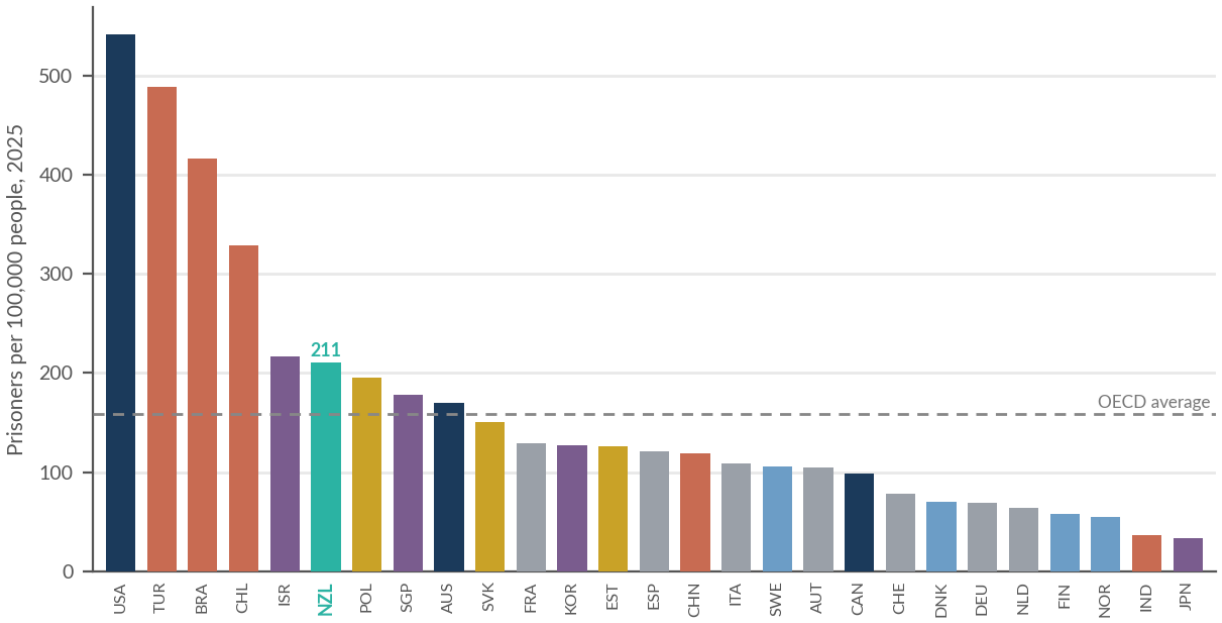
Source: UNODC via Our World in Data

New Zealand's homicide rate of 1.46 per 100,000 sits ninth of 29 countries, exactly on the OECD average. The chart's top is dominated by the Americas: Brazil at 19.3, Chile at 6.4 and the United States at 5.8, the latter four times New Zealand's rate and eighty times Singapore's. The safest places are East Asian and Southern European: Singapore (0.07), Japan (0.23), South Korea (0.48) and Italy (0.57). The chart uses a logarithmic scale because the rates span more than two orders of magnitude.

The trans-Tasman gap runs the wrong way here. Australia's rate of 0.85 is little more than half New Zealand's, a reversal of the usual expectation, and Australia has improved markedly since 2000, from 1.89, while New Zealand has drifted slightly upward from 1.35. Britain, at 1.12, also now sits below New Zealand.

Small-country counts wobble, and single events move them: New Zealand's series spikes in 2019 on the Christchurch mosque attacks, as *New Zealand by Numbers* notes. But the placement is consistent across years: New Zealand is a genuinely low-homicide society by world standards and a middling one by the standards of the rich Pacific and Western Europe. The next chart shows how much punishment that level of violence attracts.

5.02 Imprisonment

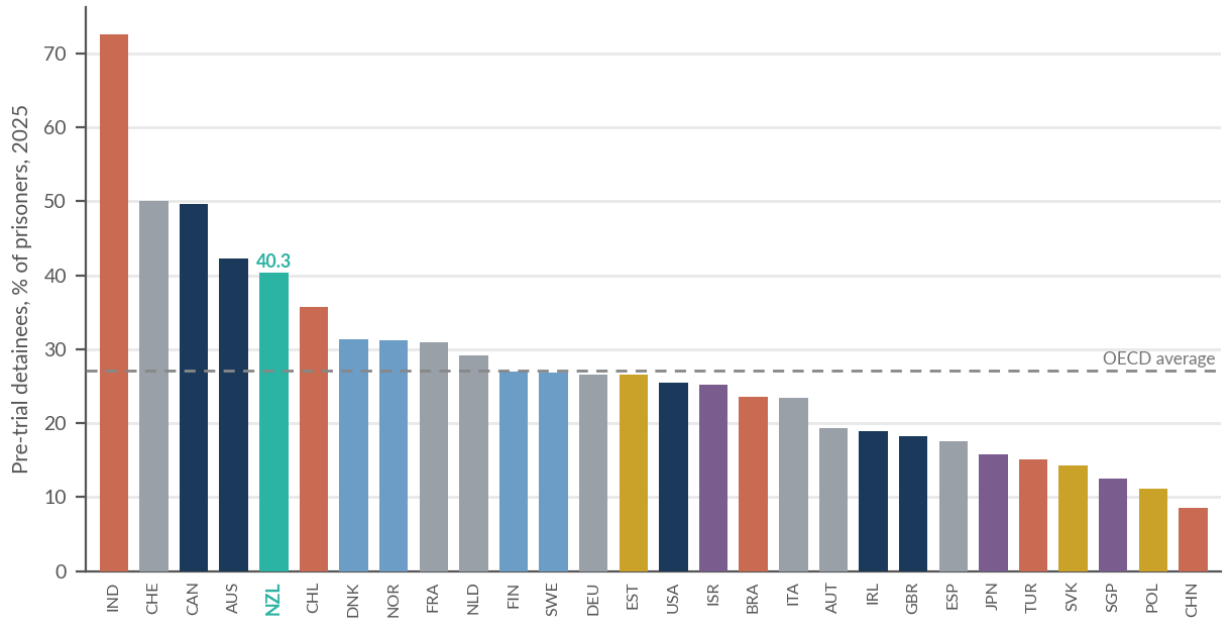


Source: World Prison Brief (ICPR)

New Zealand imprisons 211 people per 100,000, the sixth-highest rate of 27 countries and a third above the OECD average of 159. Above it stand only the United States (542), Turkey (489), Brazil (416), Chile (329) and Israel (217). Every European country in this book locks up fewer, and Northern Europe locks up a third as many: Germany 69, the Netherlands 64, Finland 58, Norway 55. Japan, with the world's lowest homicide rates, imprisons 33.

Set this against the previous page and the disproportion appears. Australia, with half New Zealand's homicide rate, imprisons 170 per 100,000; Canada, with a higher homicide rate, imprisons 98. New Zealand's prison population, as *New Zealand by Numbers* records, reached a record 11,255 in March 2026. If New Zealand imprisoned at Australia's rate it would hold about 2,200 fewer people; at Western Europe's, fewer than half its current number. Imprisonment rates reflect sentencing law, bail law and parole practice compounded over decades, as much as they reflect crime rates, and the United States proves the point at scale. The fiscal weight of the difference is measurable: at the Department of Corrections' reported average cost of roughly NZ$150,000 per prisoner per year, the gap between New Zealand's rate and Australia's amounts to something on the order of a third of a billion dollars annually, and the gap to Germany's to over a billion.

5.03 Remand



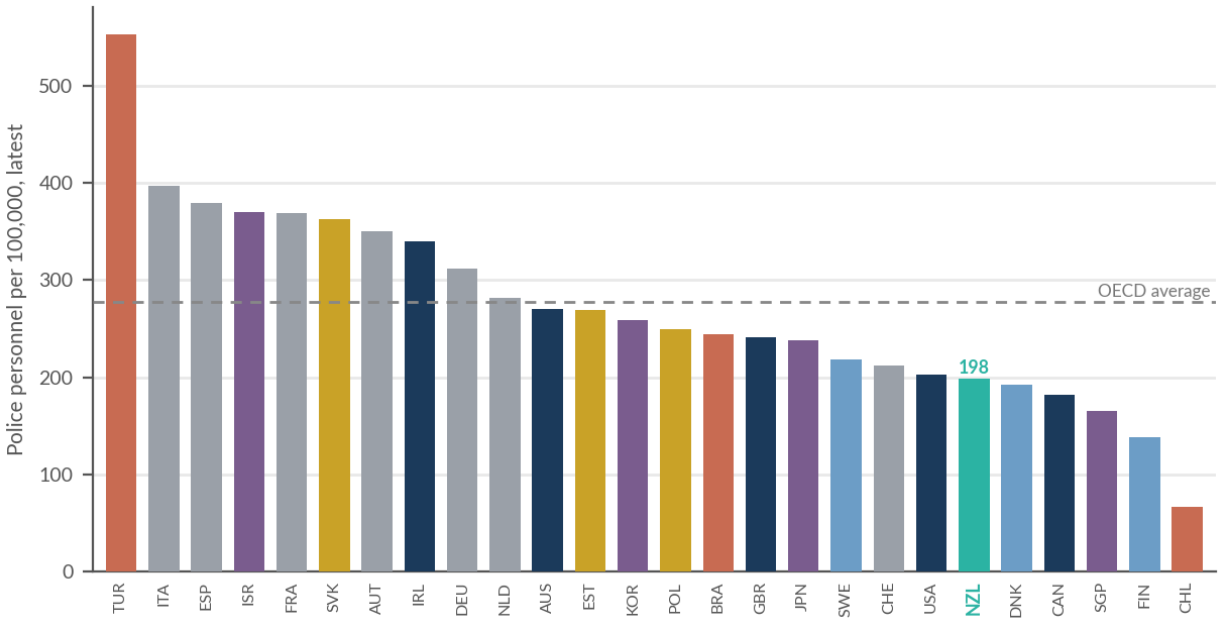
Source: World Prison Brief (ICPR)

Two in five New Zealand prisoners, 40.3%, have not been sentenced. That is the fifth-highest remand share of 28 countries, exceeded only by India (72.6%), where trial delay is a national crisis, Switzerland (50.1%), Canada (49.6%) and Australia (42.2%). The OECD average is 27.2%. China (8.6%), Poland (11.2%) and Singapore (12.5%) run the smallest remand shares.

The chart rewards careful reading. A high remand share can mean slow courts, strict bail laws or, paradoxically, low sentenced numbers: Switzerland's and Canada's high shares partly reflect small, short-sentence prison populations. New Zealand enjoys no such excuse, because its overall imprisonment rate is also among the highest, as the previous page showed. High rate and high remand share together mean the absolute number of unconvicted people in custody, over 4,500 on the domestic figures in *New Zealand by Numbers*, is large by any rich-country standard.

The common Anglosphere pattern points at a common cause: bail legislation tightened in successive political cycles, in New Zealand's case notably in 2013. People held on remand are legally innocent, disproportionately Māori in New Zealand's case, and their time in custody produces neither the punishment a court has ordered nor the rehabilitation a sentence at least attempts.

5.04 Police numbers



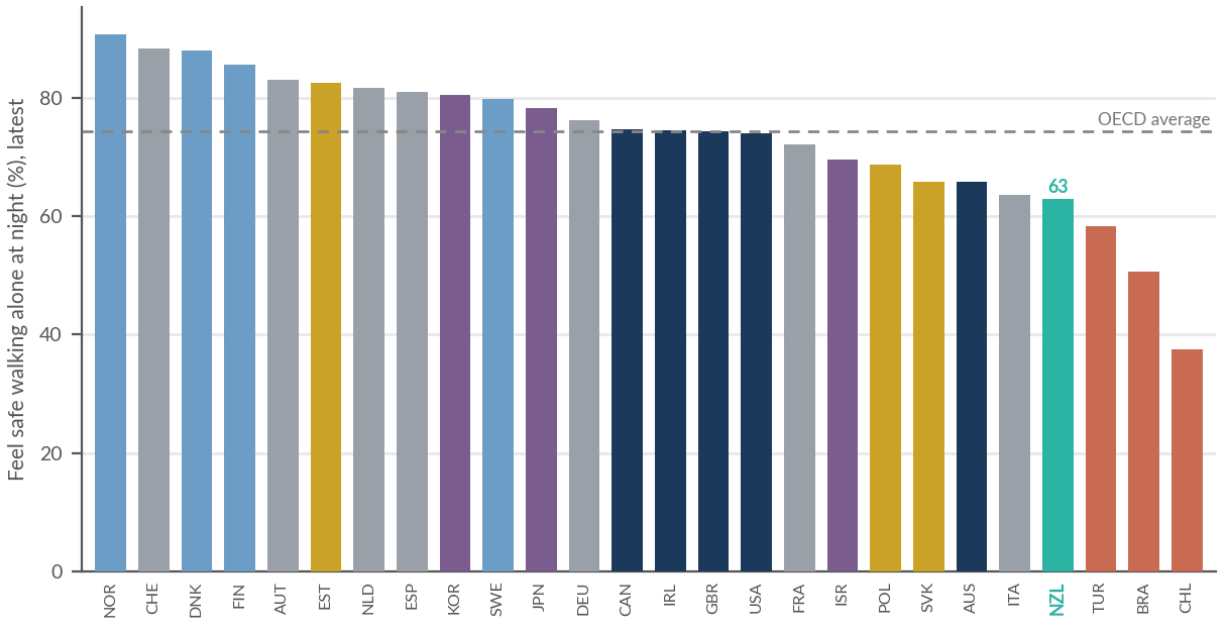
Source: UNODC; NZ Police; national sources

New Zealand fields 198 police per 100,000 people, 21st of 26 countries and well below the OECD average of 277. The heavily policed societies are Mediterranean and Middle Eastern: Turkey (553), Italy (397), Spain (379) and Israel (370). The lightly policed are an interesting club: Finland (139), Canada (182), Denmark (192), New Zealand (198) and the United States (202), with Chile's low figure a reporting quirk.

Police density correlates with almost nothing an outsider would predict. Finland, the least policed country on the chart, is among the safest on every other measure; Turkey and Italy, the most policed, are not. Federal structures, gendarmeries and what counts as a 'police officer' muddy the definitions. Past a modest threshold, though, safety is produced by social conditions, not headcount.

New Zealand's lean policing model matches its Nordic and Canadian peers, and the domestic ratio, roughly one officer per 510 residents on the figures in *New Zealand by Numbers*, has been broadly stable for a decade.

5.05 Feeling safe



Source: Gallup World Poll via OECD How's Life

Asked whether they feel safe walking alone at night in their own neighbourhood, 62.9% of New Zealanders say yes. That ranks 23rd of 26 countries, above only Turkey, Brazil and Chile. Norway (90.7%), Switzerland (88.2%) and Denmark (88.0%) top the chart. Australians, at 65.8%, feel scarcely safer than New Zealanders, and the two Tasman neighbours sit below Americans (73.9%), whose objective risks are several times higher.

Set this page beside 5.01 and the two lines refuse to meet. New Zealand's homicide rate matches the OECD average; its felt safety ranks near the bottom. South Korea and Japan feel roughly as safe as their statistics warrant; the Anglosphere and Latin America feel less safe than their objective risks would imply; Scandinavia feels exactly as safe as it is. Media diets, urban design and the sheer salience of crime in political culture all plausibly contribute, and women's reported safety drives much of the cross-country variation.

Feelings are facts too. People who fear the streets use them less, and their fear constrains lives regardless of the statistics. But felt safety and measured harm are different quantities, and the distance between them, visible across this whole chapter, is itself one of the chapter's findings.

CHAPTER SIX

Technology and Digital Life

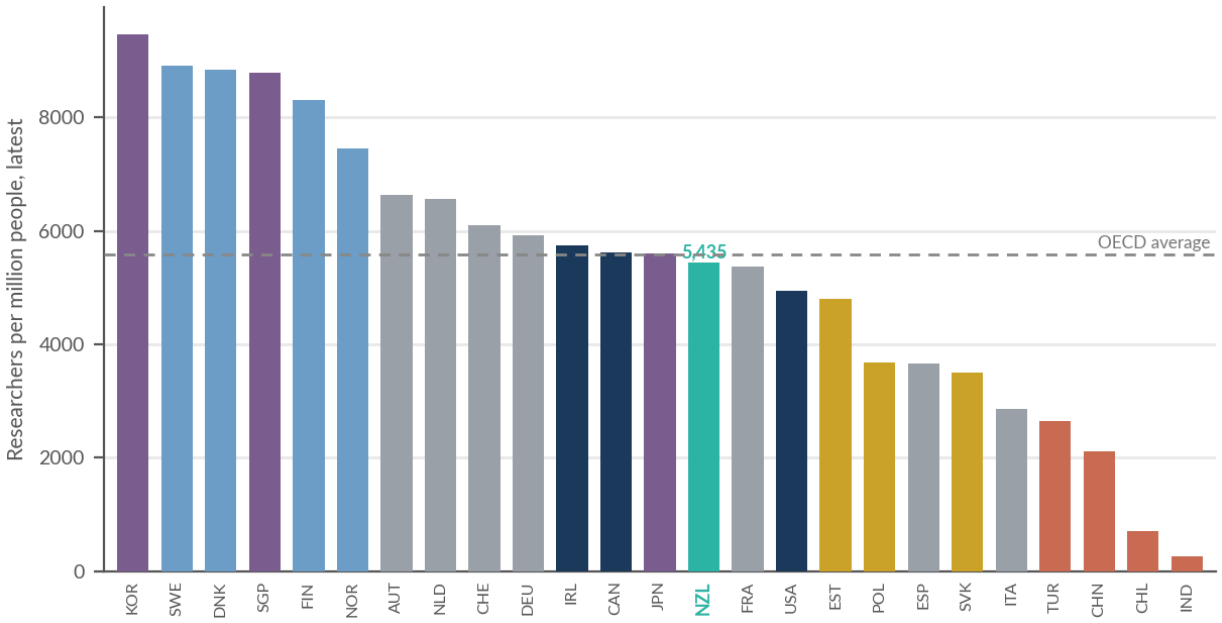
Technology is where a small remote country either buys itself out of geography or is buried by it. Fibre to the door puts Auckland's connectivity in the same league as Frankfurt's, even if distance still rules everything that moves in containers; a thin research base keeps its firms consumers rather than producers of the ideas that drive the leading economies. Both halves of that sentence are measured in this chapter, and both are true of New Zealand at once.

The connectivity story is a success told too rarely. Seven in ten New Zealand fixed broadband connections run on fibre, the eighth-highest share of 26 countries and far ahead of Australia (28%), Britain (26%) and the United States (24%), the dividend of the Ultra-Fast Broadband build whose delivery *New Zealand by Numbers* records. On internet use, mobile connections and digital government, New Zealand sits respectably in the rich world's pack.

The innovation inputs tell the other story. New Zealand's research spending ranks 22nd of 29 countries, barely six-tenths of the OECD norm and a quarter of Israel's share. Its researcher workforce, though, has more than doubled relative to population since the late 1990s and now sits near the OECD norm, which makes the funding gap, not the people, the binding constraint, or so one reading goes. The other reading, aired in *New Zealand by Numbers*, is that a small economy prospers by adopting the world's ideas quickly rather than inventing its own.

On the newest technology of all, the honest report is a gap in the data: the main cross-country AI surveys do not yet include New Zealand. The domestic surveys suggest adoption at the front of the global pack. The next edition of this book should be able to say so with a chart rather than a caveat.

6.01 Researchers



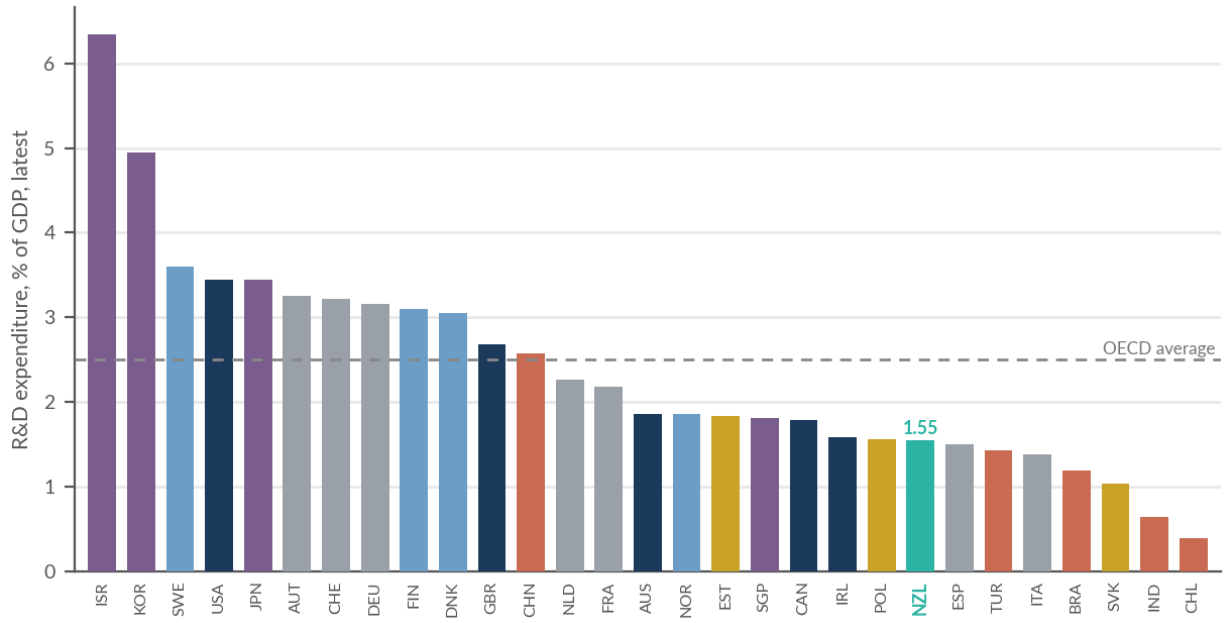
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics

New Zealand employs about 5,400 researchers per million people, 14th of 25 countries with data and close to the OECD average of 5,581. South Korea (9,472), Sweden (8,911), Denmark (8,838) and Singapore (8,782) lead the world. France (5,369) and the United States (4,937) sit alongside and below New Zealand, and the chart's basement, Chile at 707 and India at 259, marks the true global divide in scientific capacity.

New Zealand's climb is easy to miss. In 1999 the country had about 2,300 researchers per million; the figure has since more than doubled, one of the faster expansions on the chart, driven by university growth and migration. Whatever constrains New Zealand's innovation performance, a shortage of trained researchers is no longer the obvious candidate.

New Zealand's researcher density is near the OECD norm; its research spending, the next page shows, is barely six-tenths of it. Researchers without commensurate funding do cheap research, which in practice means university research rather than the industrial kind. The composition problem, not the headcount, is where New Zealand diverges from the small advanced economies above it.

6.02 R&D spending



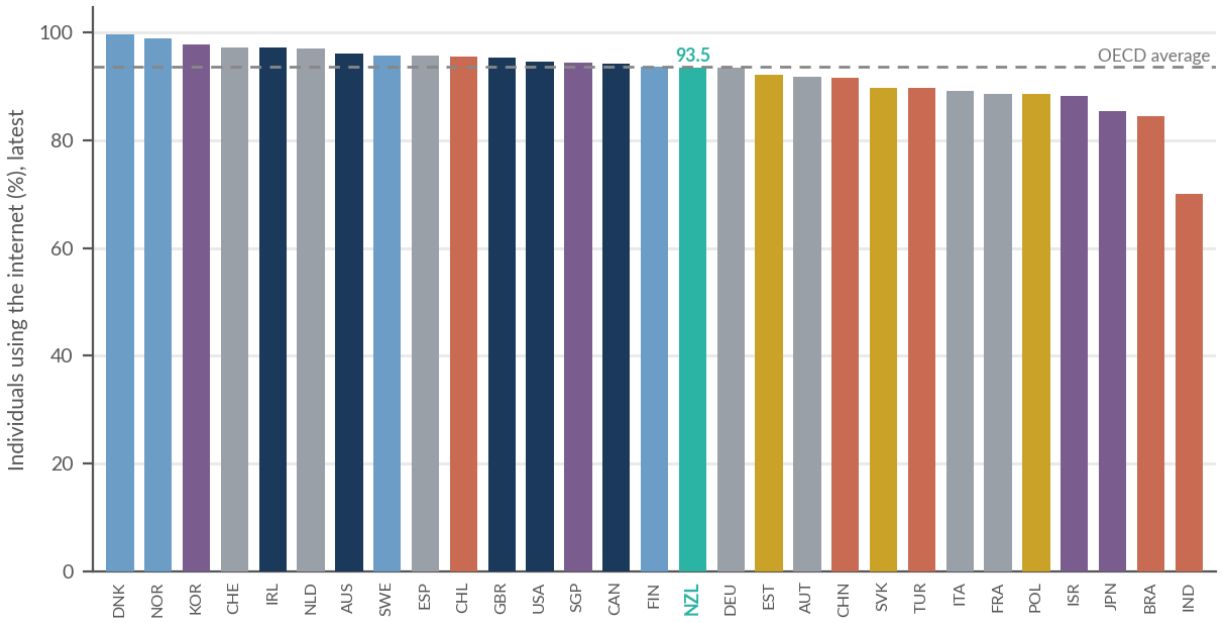
Source: World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics; OECD

New Zealand spends 1.55% of GDP on research and development, 22nd of 29 countries and well below the OECD average of 2.5%. Israel (6.4%) and South Korea (4.9%) are in a class of their own, followed by Sweden (3.6%), the United States (3.5%) and Japan (3.4%). China, at 2.6%, now outspends most of Europe. Below New Zealand sit Spain, Turkey, Italy, Slovakia and the emerging economies, with Chile's 0.4% at the floor.

The gap is long-lived. New Zealand spent 0.96% of GDP in 1999 and has added six-tenths of a point in a quarter century, while the OECD average moved up roughly as fast: the distance to the pack has barely closed, as *New Zealand by Numbers* likewise concludes. Australia, at 1.9%, spends a fifth more; Britain, at 2.7%, nearly three-quarters more.

Whether the gap is a disease or a symptom has an evidenced answer: research by Arthur Grimes and colleagues found New Zealand no outlier on R&D or patenting once economic size, firm size, distance and sectoral composition are controlled for, and if anything a slight over-performer. Business R&D concentrates in manufacturing and large firms, and New Zealand has little of the first and few of the second, so the low figure largely restates its industrial structure, itself a product of size, distance and capital shallowness. The cure, on that reading, is not an R&D target but the deeper reforms Chapter 8 gestures at. Targets are cheaper to announce, which is why every government announces them.

6.03 Internet use



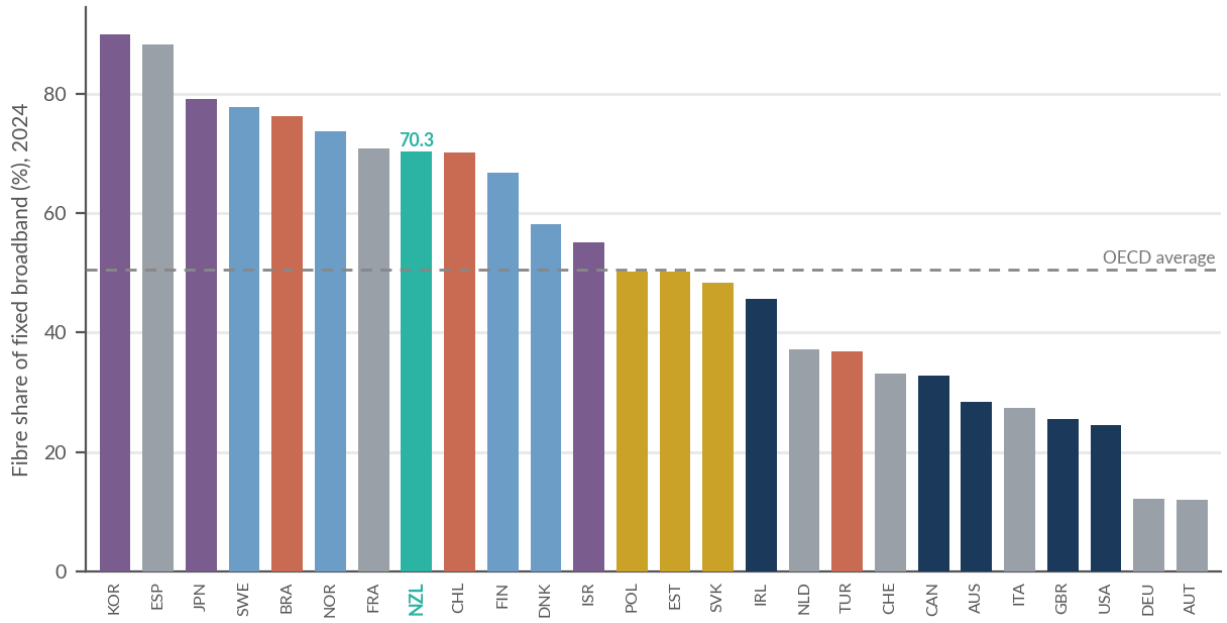
Source: ITU via World Bank

In New Zealand, 93.5% of people use the internet, 16th of 29 countries and almost exactly the OECD average of 93.6%. The chart has effectively saturated across the rich world: Denmark leads at 99.8%, and twenty countries sit above 90%. The residual gradient belongs to the emerging economies, India at 70%, Brazil at 84.5%, and to Japan's surprisingly modest 85.5%.

No technology in these pages spread faster. In 2000, 47% of New Zealanders were online, a touch ahead of Australia and the United States and far ahead of Britain's 27%; the race to saturation took two decades and everyone finished. The remaining offline minority everywhere skews old, poor and rural, which makes the last few points the hardest and the most policy-relevant.

Saturation moves the question, as it did when Stats NZ stopped counting household computers. Access no longer differentiates rich countries; speed, price and skills do. That is what the next two pages measure, and where New Zealand's position turns from average to genuinely strong.

6.04 Fibre broadband



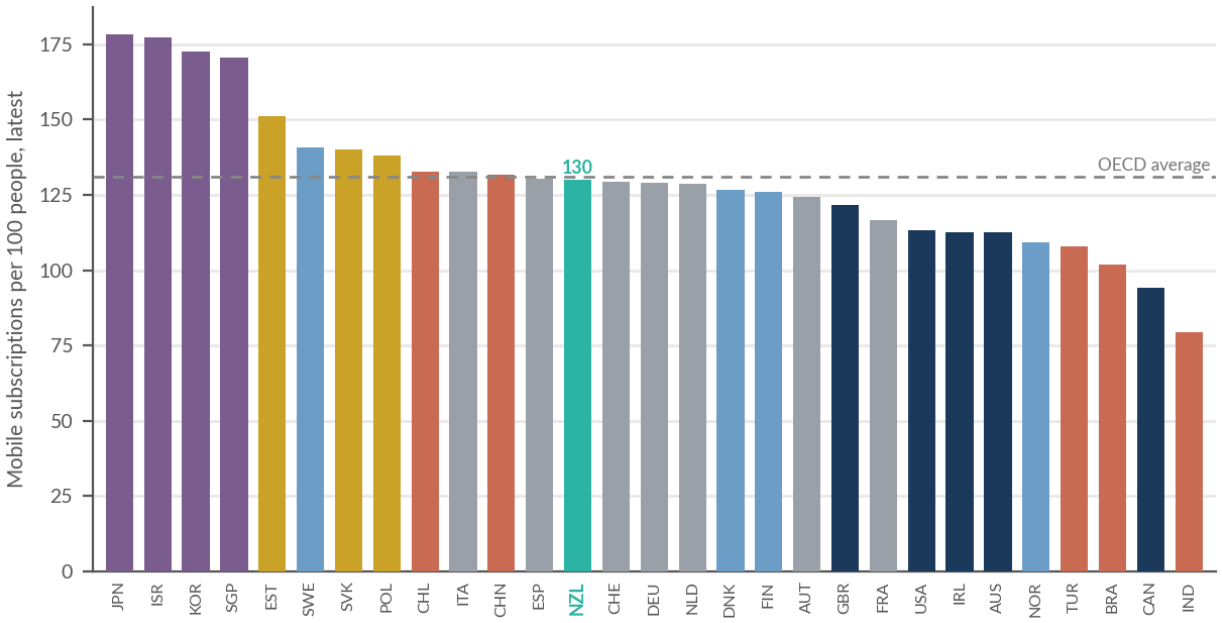
Source: OECD Broadband Portal

Fibre carries 70.3% of New Zealand's fixed broadband connections, the eighth-highest share of 26 OECD countries and well above the OECD average of 50.6%. South Korea (90.0%), Spain (88.3%) and Japan (79.2%) lead. The instructive tail is Anglophone and Germanic: Australia at 28.3%, Britain at 25.6%, the United States at 24.5%, Germany at 12.2% and Austria at 12.0%, rich countries still running the internet over copper and cable.

In 2015 New Zealand's fibre share was 7.5%, indistinguishable from Australia's 6.4%. New Zealand then finished its Ultra-Fast Broadband build, on time and under budget as *New Zealand by Numbers* records, while Australia's National Broadband Network delivered a mixed-technology compromise. A decade later the gap is 42 percentage points, as clean a side-by-side policy comparison as the rich world offers.

The lesson generalises beyond cables. Both countries faced the same geography-driven case for public investment; one specified a simple, future-proof technology and contracted it out cleanly, the other litigated its design through three governments. Chapter 8's infrastructure page shows New Zealand does not always get this right. Here it did, and the dividend compounds every year.

6.05 Mobile connections



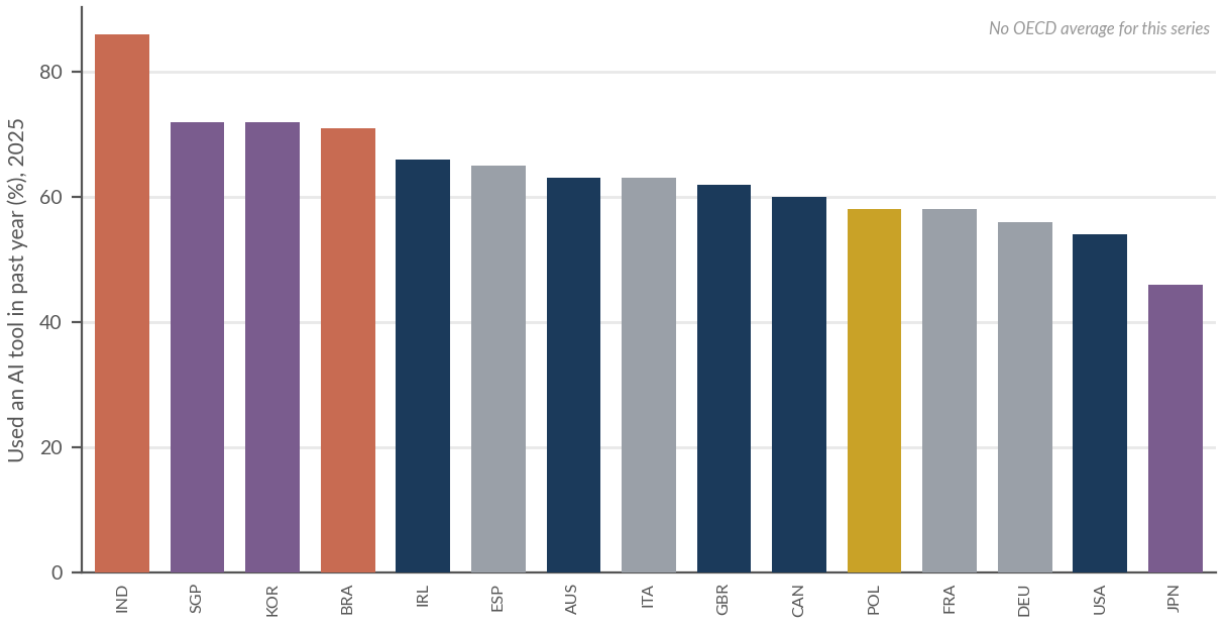
Source: ITU via World Bank

New Zealand runs 130 mobile subscriptions per 100 people, 13th of 29 countries and level with the OECD average of 131. Japan (178), Israel (177) and South Korea (173) lead a chart on which nearly every country long ago passed one connection per person; only India (79) and Canada (94) remain below the line, with Brazil (102) barely above it. Multiple SIMs, machines and mobile broadband dongles, not phone-less citizens, explain the excess everywhere else.

The catch-up was total. In 2000 New Zealand had 40 subscriptions per 100 people and Britain 74; the gap closed within a decade and the ranking has been meaningless ever since. Mobile connectivity is the one technology in this chapter where geography, income and policy stopped mattering almost everywhere, which is precisely why the chart has become flat.

Its residual interest is the floor, not the ceiling. Canada's 94 reflects a concentrated, expensive market, a caution that ownership structure can still show up in a saturated technology, and India's 79 marks how much diffusion remains in the world's largest country. For New Zealand, the page records a solved problem, and solved problems deserve one page, no more.

6.06 AI adoption



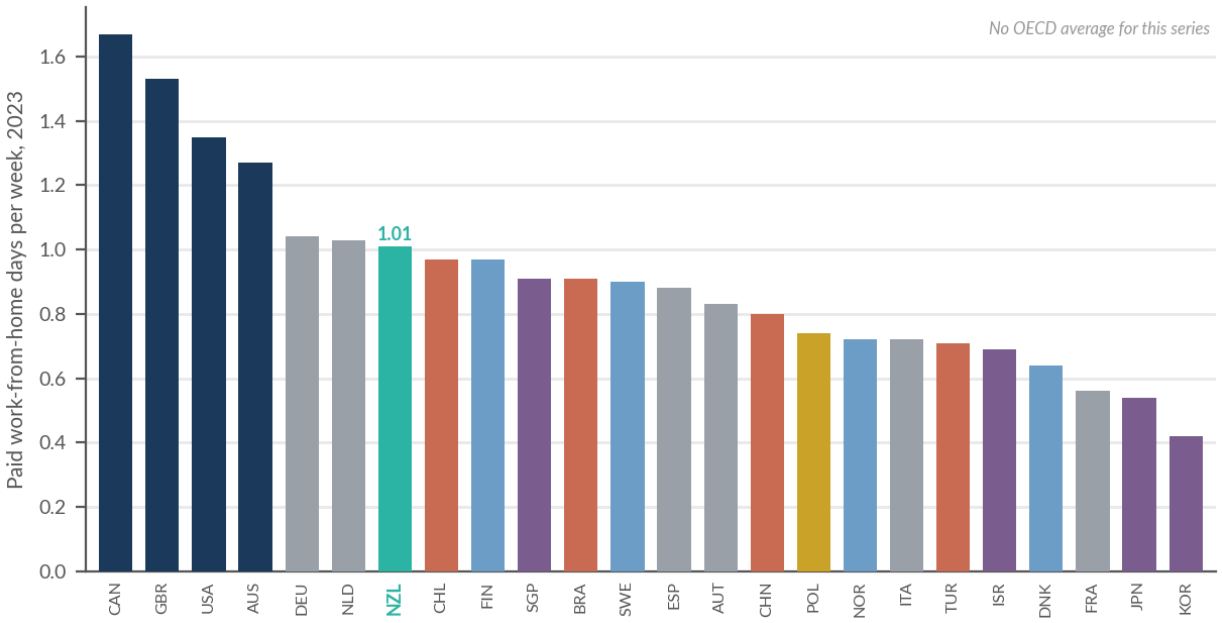
Source: Google/Ipsos multi-country survey, 2025

The newest indicator in this book is also its most incomplete. The best current cross-country survey of AI use, covering 15 of the 29 countries, finds India (86%), Singapore and South Korea (72%) leading the share of adults who used an AI tool in the past year, with Japan (46%) and the United States (54%) at the rear of those measured. The emerging economies' lead is real and repeated across surveys: leapfrogging, again.

New Zealand is absent from the main multi-country AI surveys to date, so its bar does not appear. The domestic evidence, from the Datacom and InternetNZ surveys that *New Zealand by Numbers* reports, puts four in five New Zealanders using AI in the year to 2025, which would place the country at or near the top of this chart if the measures were comparable. They are not quite, and this book does not pretend otherwise.

Adoption everywhere is running years ahead of official measurement, workplace use is outpacing policy, and the countries embracing the technology fastest are not the ones that invented it. Stats NZ's first business AI survey, launched in April 2026, should let the next edition replace this caveat with a bar.

6.07 Working from home



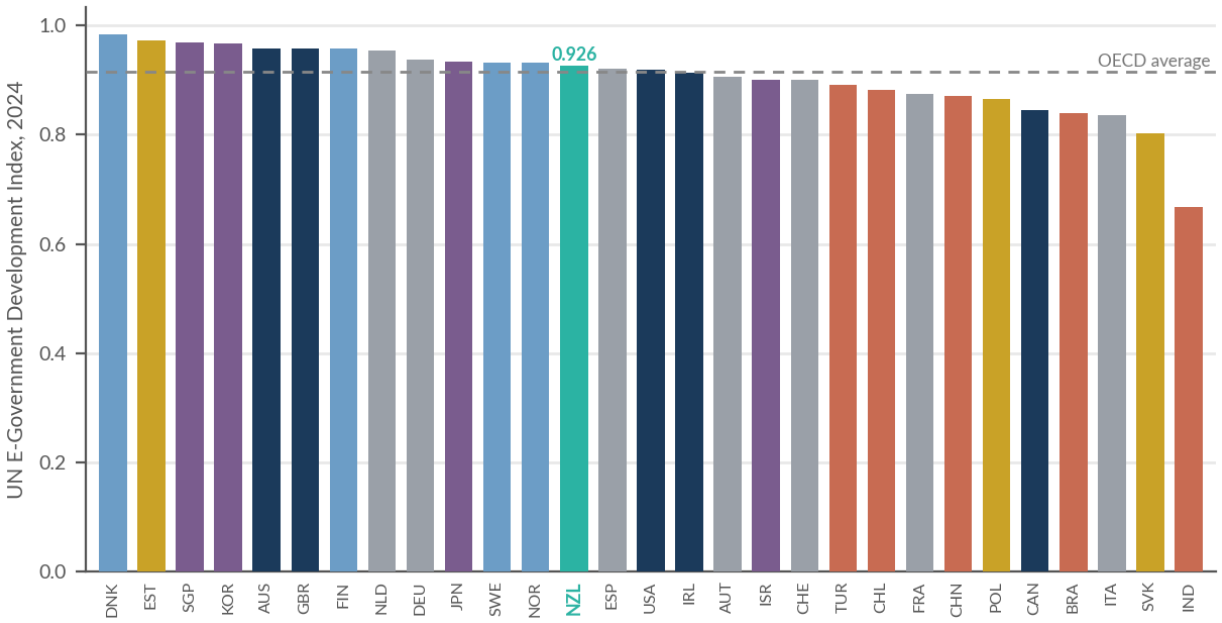
Source: Global Survey of Working Arrangements (WFH Research)

New Zealand employees with the option work from home about 1.0 paid day a week on average, seventh of 24 countries surveyed and above the global survey average of 0.9. The Anglosphere dominates: Canada (1.7 days), Britain (1.5), the United States (1.4) and Australia (1.3) lead the world in remote work, while East Asia barely participates, Japan at 0.5 days and South Korea at 0.4, with France (0.6) closer to Seoul than to London.

The pattern tracks culture and industry more than technology. English-speaking labour markets combine service-heavy economies, long commutes and managerial cultures that, post-pandemic, conceded autonomy; Japanese and Korean workplaces did not. New Zealand sits below its Anglosphere kin, plausibly reflecting shorter commutes and a smaller white-collar share, but above most of continental Europe, Germany and the Netherlands excepted.

The stakes ride on housing and transport as much as on offices. Remote work shifts housing demand outward, as New Zealand's own census work-from-home surge, recorded in *New Zealand by Numbers*, already shows. A country whose cities are as supply-constrained as Chapter 9 documents has more to gain than most from letting some of its labour market log in from Taranaki.

6.08 Digital government



Source: UN E-Government Development Index 2024

The United Nations scores every country's digital government on services, infrastructure and human capital. New Zealand's 2024 score of 0.93 ranks 13th of the 29 countries here, in a tight leading pack headed by Denmark (0.98), Estonia, Singapore and South Korea (all 0.97). Australia and Britain (0.96) also outrank New Zealand. The laggards among the rich are Canada (0.85) and Italy (0.84).

The mild surprise is the direction of travel. New Zealand ranked in the world's top ten as recently as the early 2020s and has slipped to the mid-teens globally, not because its services worsened but because Gulf states, East Asia and the Baltics invested faster. Estonia remains the standing rebuke to every incrementalist: a country of 1.4 million where residents file taxes in minutes and prescriptions, registrations and even voting can be handled digitally end to end.

Digital government is bureaucratic productivity, the public half of the productivity problem that Chapter 7 measures in the market economy. A citizen's hour saved at a portal is worth the same as an hour saved at a factory. New Zealand's stack is good; the leaders moved. Chapter 11 asks the same question of the state's analogue machinery, with a similar answer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Labour Market and Productivity

If this book had to be compressed to a single chapter, it would be this one, and the chapter itself compresses to a single sentence: New Zealanders work more than almost anyone in the rich world and produce less per hour than almost all of their peers. Much of the country's economic debate follows from that sentence.

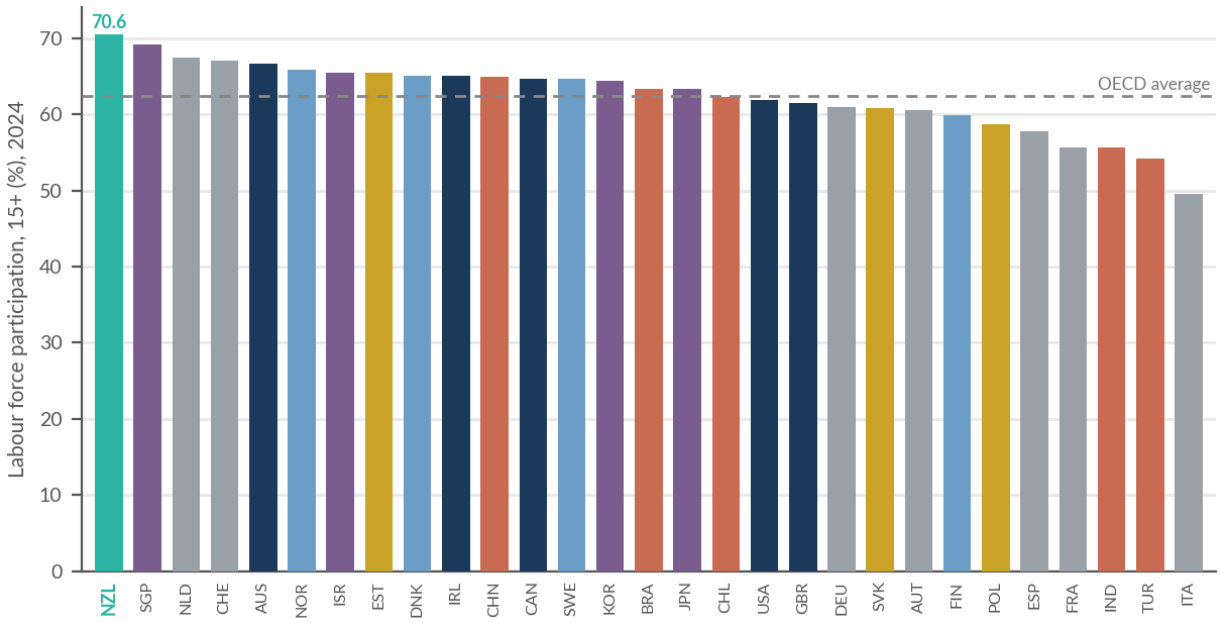
The first half of the ledger is a triumph. New Zealand has the highest labour force participation of all 29 countries here, the second-highest employment rate, unemployment near the rich-world middle and hours worked above the OECD average. Whatever faults the New Zealand labour market has, idleness is not among them. The flexible, high-employment machine that emerged from the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s still runs, and runs well.

The second half undoes the first. At 49.6 international dollars of output per hour, New Zealand ranks 20th of 29, producing in an hour what the Australian produces in 39 minutes and the American in 36. In 1970 New Zealand and Britain stood level; Britain now leads by more than a third.

No amount of extra effort can close a gap of that size, because the effort is already being made: the hours are worked, the people participate. The shortfall is in capital, scale, know-how and the allocation of all three.

Wages follow productivity, which is why New Zealand's average wage now trails the OECD average and sits about US$10,700 a year behind Australia's at purchasing power parity. The airport departure lounges of Chapter 1 are this chapter's numbers wearing shoes.

7.01 Participation



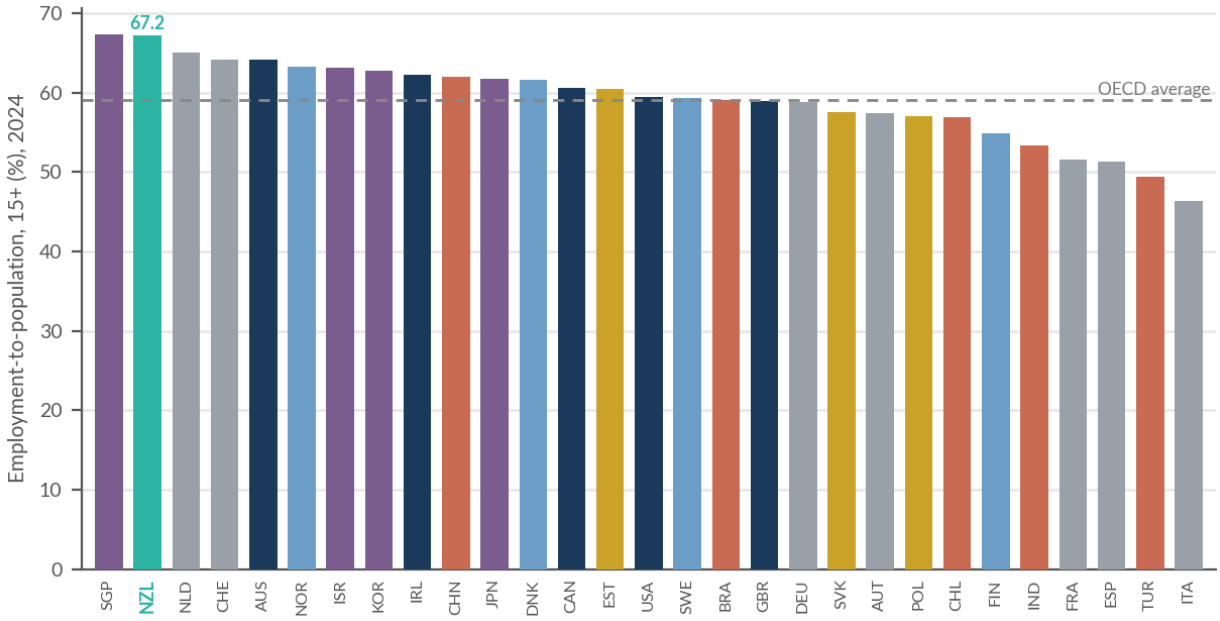
Source: ILO modelled estimates via World Bank

First of 29: 70.6% of New Zealanders aged 15 and over are in the labour force, the highest participation rate in this book, ahead of Singapore (69.2%), the Netherlands (67.5%) and Switzerland (67.1%). The OECD average is 62.4%. Italy sits at the bottom at 49.6%, with Turkey (54.2%) and France (55.7%) not far above: in much of Southern Europe, barely half the adult population works or seeks work.

The achievement is doubly notable because the measure includes everyone over 15, so ageing drags it down mechanically. New Zealand outranks every younger country on the chart regardless. Female participation, at 66.1% on the domestic measure *New Zealand by Numbers* cites, is among the OECD's highest, and participation has risen six points since 2000 while America's fell four.

This is the healthy half of the New Zealand growth model: more of the population works than anywhere else in the rich world. The model's limit is arithmetic. There is little room left to raise participation, so growth-through-more-workers has nearly run its course. What remains is growth through better hours, which is the story of 7.11, and it is a very different story.

7.02 Employment rate

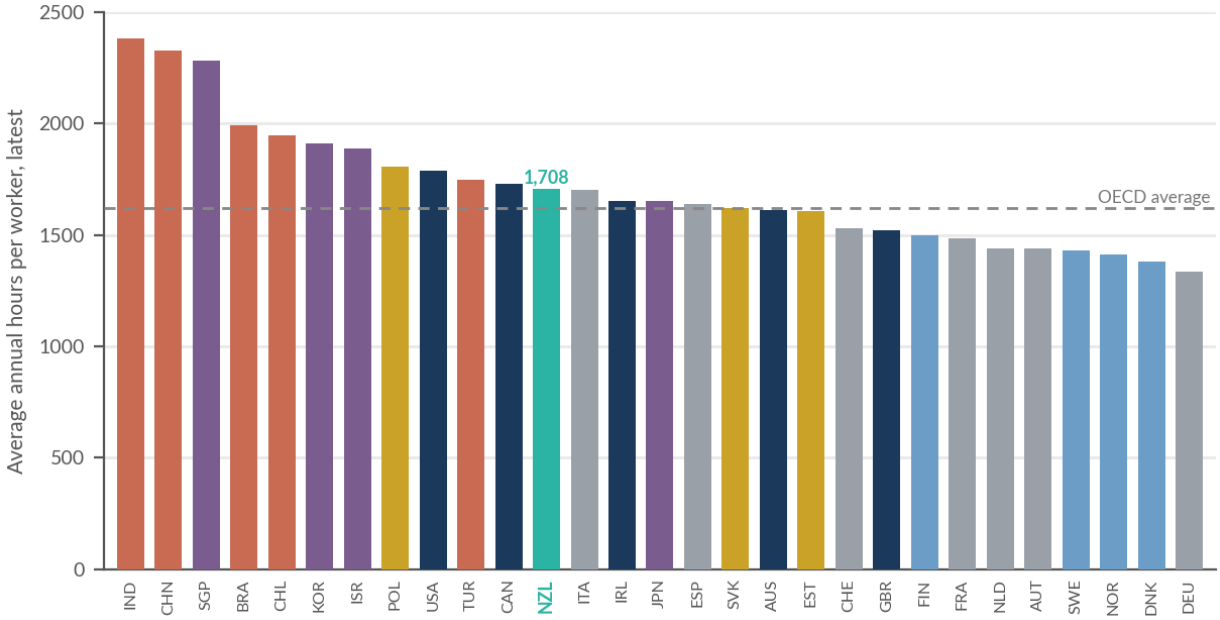


Source: ILO modelled estimates via World Bank

The employment-to-population ratio strips out unemployment and asks simply what share of adults hold a job. New Zealand's 67.2% is second of 29, a whisker behind Singapore's 67.3% and ahead of the Netherlands (65.0%), Switzerland (64.2%) and Australia (64.1%). The OECD average is 59.0%; Italy's 46.4% again anchors the bottom, and Turkey, France and Spain all leave more than 48% of their adults without paid work.

The change since 2000 splits the Anglosphere, though the year 2000 caught America at the top of the dot-com boom and flatters the contrast. New Zealand's ratio rose more than six points; Australia's rose almost five; Britain's rose one; America's fell four, a decline that predates the pandemic and remains one of the more consequential facts in American economics. New Zealand's climb owes much to women and older workers staying in jobs, the same forces documented in the domestic series. A high employment rate is welfare policy, fiscal policy and social policy at once: every point on this measure is fewer benefit recipients, more taxpayers and, on most of the evidence, better lives. New Zealand's problem, as the rest of this chapter shows, is what each hour of work yields, not getting people into it.

7.03 Hours worked



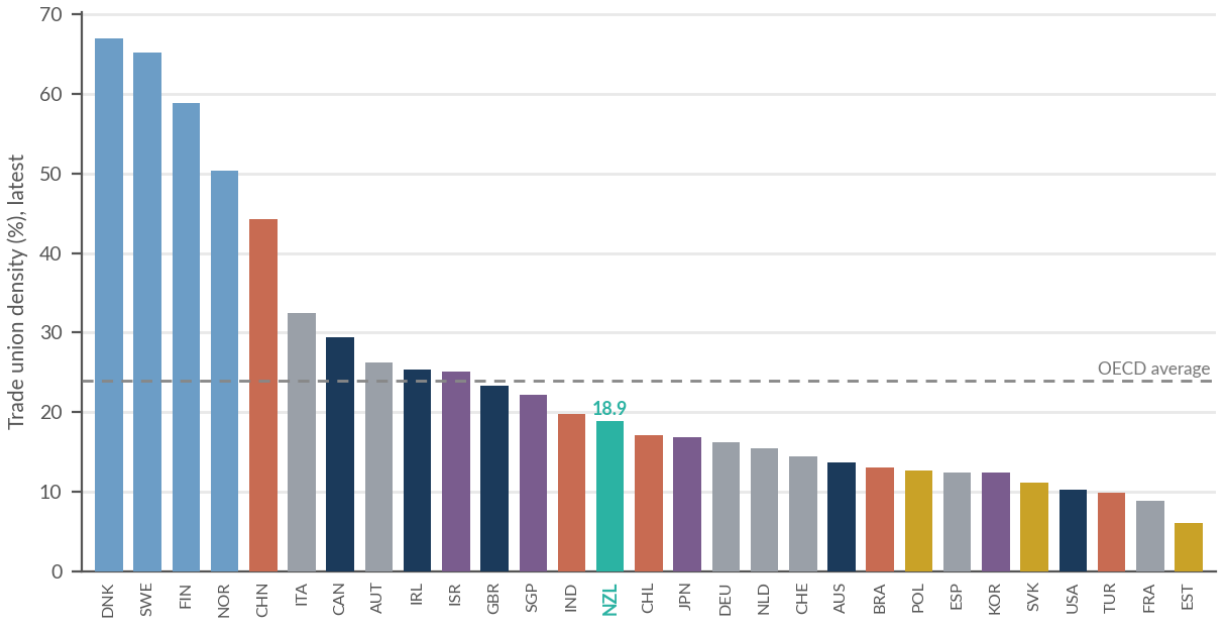
Source: Penn World Table via Our World in Data

The average employed New Zealander worked 1,708 hours in 2023, 12th of 29 and well above the OECD average of 1,620. The chart's extremes tell the development story: Indian (2,383), Chinese (2,328) and Singaporean (2,283) workers put in the longest years, while the German worker's 1,335 hours is the shortest among the countries compared here, 370 hours, more than nine working weeks, less than the New Zealander's.

Within the rich world, New Zealand is a long-hours country: among its high-income peers only the United States (1,789), Canada, Israel and South Korea work longer, and New Zealand sits clear of Australia (1,611), Britain (1,523) and the entire north European bloc. The Dutch, Austrians, Swedes, Norwegians and Danes all work under 1,440 hours. Hours have fallen everywhere since 2000, in New Zealand by about 100, but the ordering barely moves.

The pairing of long hours with the productivity ranking eight pages on is the chapter's central exhibit. Germans work the fewest hours of any country compared here and produce 82.5 dollars in each one; New Zealanders work 28% longer to produce 49.6. Long hours are not diligence to be celebrated; past a point they are the visible symptom of an economy compensating for weak productivity with sheer time, and the German comparison suggests where that point lies.

7.04 Union membership



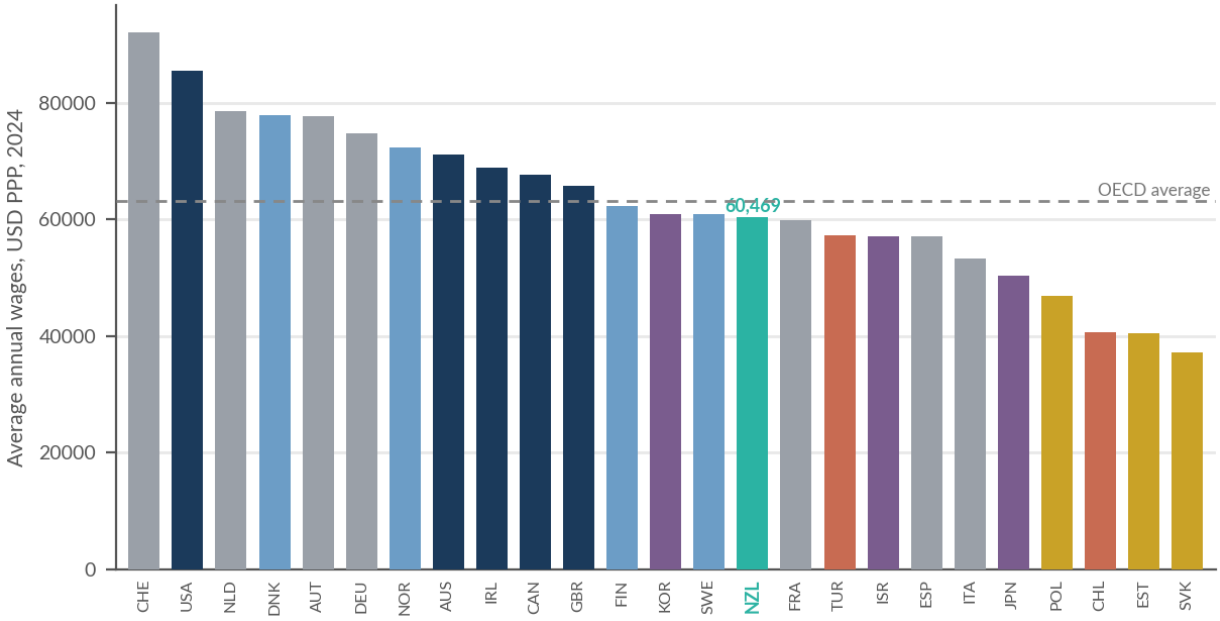
Source: ILO; OECD

About 18.9% of New Zealand workers belong to a trade union, 14th of 29 countries and below the OECD average of 24.0. The Nordic system stands apart, with Denmark (67.0%), Sweden (65.2%) and Finland (58.8%) sustained by union-run unemployment insurance. At the other end, France's famously strike-prone labour market has the rich world's second-lowest membership at 8.9%, proof that union power and union membership are different things. Estonia (6.0%) and the United States (10.3%) round out the floor.

New Zealand's figure is the residue of the great deunionisation that *New Zealand by Numbers* records: compulsory membership until 1991, then the Employment Contracts Act, then stabilisation around one worker in five, concentrated in the public sector, health and education. Australia has fallen further, from 26.5% in 2000 to 13.7%.

The comparative lesson cuts both ways politically. High-union Scandinavia posts excellent employment and productivity; low-union America posts excellent productivity too; and mid-union New Zealand posts neither the Nordic wage compression nor the American dynamism. Institutions matter less for how much is bargained than for what the bargaining rewards, and on that deeper question this chart is silent.

7.05 Wages



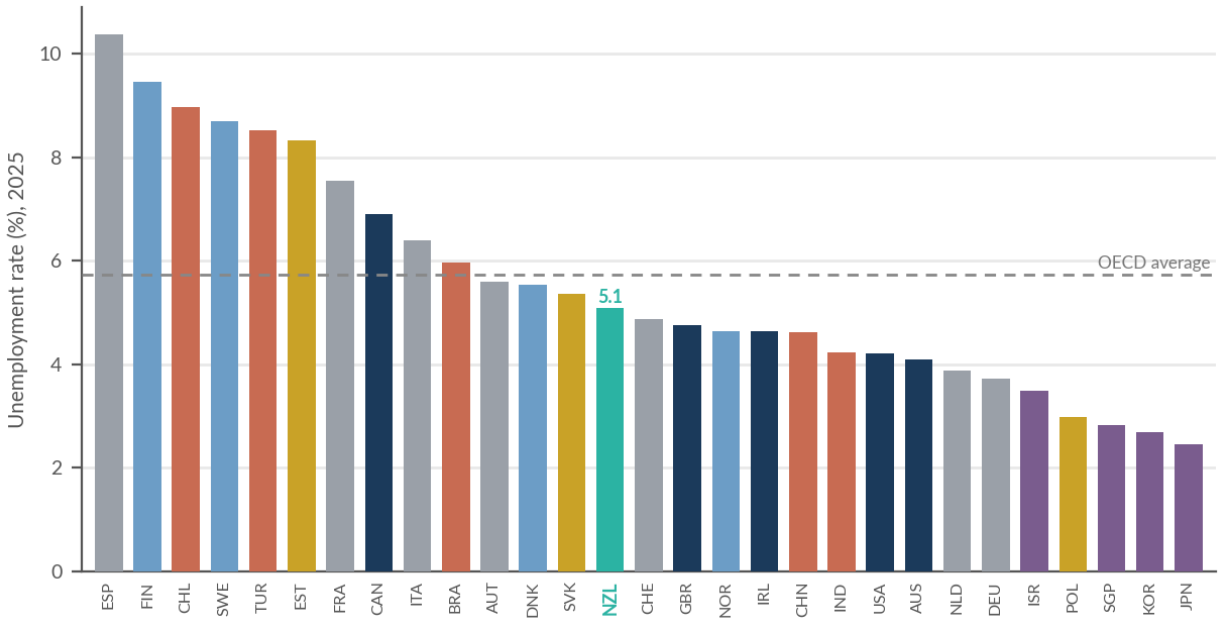
Source: OECD Average Annual Wages

Adjusted for purchasing power, the average New Zealand wage was about US$60,500 in 2024 on the OECD's constant-price series, 15th of 25 countries and below the OECD average of US$63,100. Switzerland (US$92,200) and the United States (US$85,500) lead. The comparison that stings is closer to home: Australia's average wage of US$71,200 exceeds New Zealand's by 18%, about US$10,700 a year, a gap visible in like-for-like jobs from the supermarket checkout to the hospital ward.

The gap is not ancient. In 2000 New Zealand's average wage was US$42,000 and Australia's US$58,700 at the same prices, so New Zealand has actually closed some ground in ratio terms, but eighteen points of wage gap remain, and Britain (US$65,800) has stayed ahead too. South Korea, at US$60,900, has now overtaken New Zealand, having doubled its real wage in a generation.

New Zealand's wage ranking (15th here) sits almost exactly where its productivity ranking (20th) predicts, adjusted for its long hours. The trans-Tasman flight documented in Chapter 1 follows from this page. No wage policy, minimum, median or award, can conjure what production does not create; 7.11 holds the explanation.

7.06 Unemployment



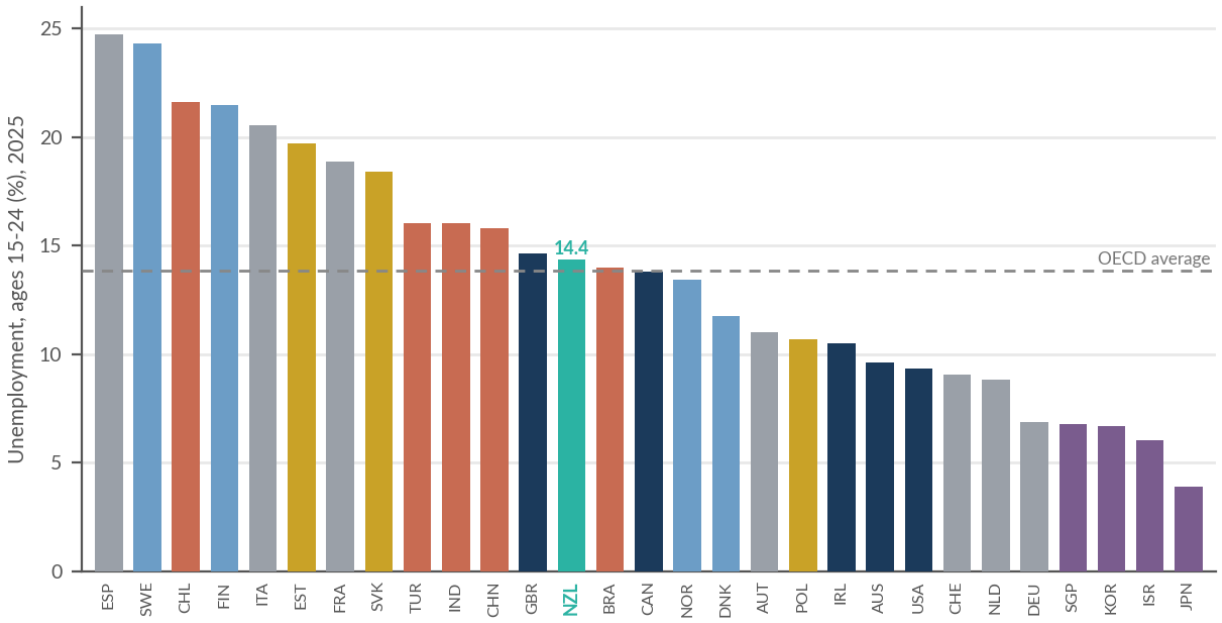
Source: ILO modelled estimates via World Bank

New Zealand's unemployment rate of 5.1% in 2025 ranks 14th of 29, sitting a shade under the OECD average of 5.7% in an unflattering year of the domestic cycle. Spain (10.4%), Finland (9.5%) and Chile (9.0%) top the chart; Japan (2.5%), South Korea (2.7%) and Singapore (2.8%) barely know the condition. Australia, at 4.1%, rides out the same global cycle a point below New Zealand.

The snapshot catches New Zealand near a cyclical peak, as the domestic series in *New Zealand by Numbers* records, with the rate drifting up from the remarkable 3.3% of 2022. The change column gives the fairer long view: from 6.1% in 2000, the trend rate has fallen, and New Zealand has avoided both Southern Europe's chronic double digits and the double-digit spikes of its own early 1990s.

The deeper comparative fact is that unemployment has stopped being what separates successful rich economies. The spread among them has narrowed to a few points that mostly track the cycle. The action has moved to the margins the next two pages measure, the young and the detached, and to the intensive margin of productivity. On none of those is New Zealand's position as comfortable as it is here.

7.07 Youth unemployment



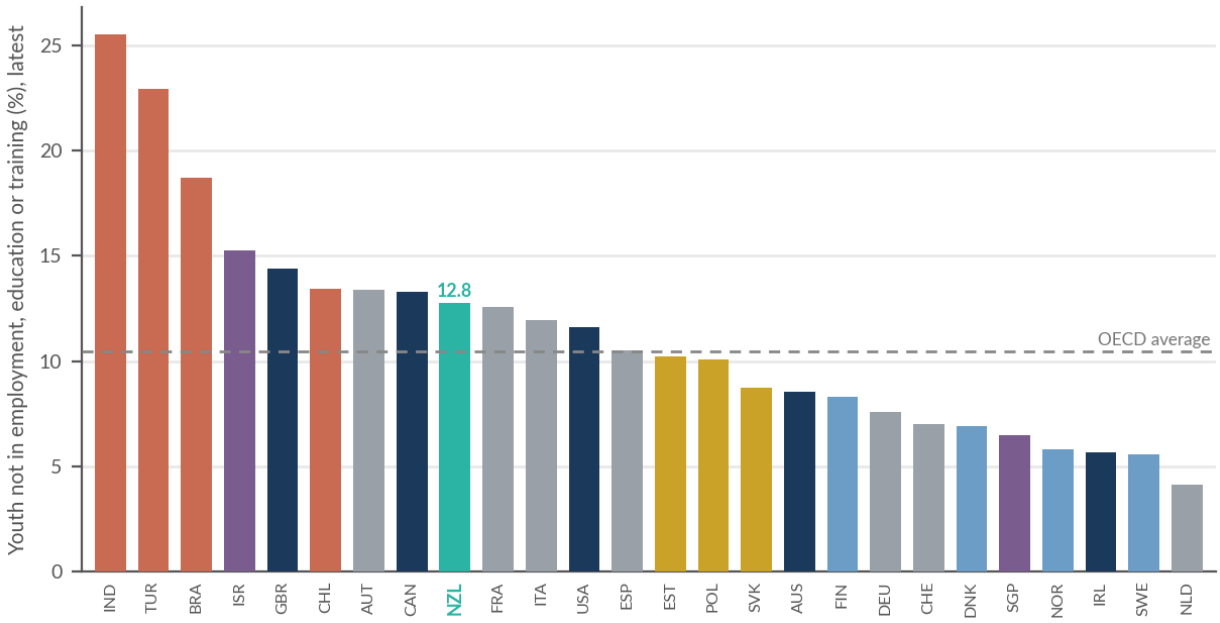
Source: ILO modelled estimates via World Bank

Unemployment among 15 to 24-year-olds in New Zealand stood at 14.4% in 2025, 13th of 29 countries and just above the OECD average of 13.9%. Spain (24.8%) and Sweden (24.3%), for opposite reasons of labour law and immigration absorption, head the chart. Japan (3.9%), Israel (6.0%) and South Korea (6.7%) barely register. Australia, at 9.6%, again outperforms New Zealand by nearly five points.

Youth unemployment runs roughly treble the adult rate in New Zealand, a multiple typical of the English-speaking countries but far above Germany's, where the apprenticeship system delivers 6.9% youth unemployment against 3.7% overall. The German dual-training model remains the benchmark for converting school leavers into workers, and no English-speaking country has managed to import it.

The caution for New Zealand is in the trend: 13.5% in 2000, 14.4% now, no progress across a quarter century in which Australia improved by two and a half points. *New Zealand by Numbers* links part of the deterioration to the abolition of youth minimum wage rates in the 2000s. Whatever the weights, a country that needs every worker it can hold, as this chapter's first pages showed, is leaving one young person in seven on the bench.

7.08 NEET



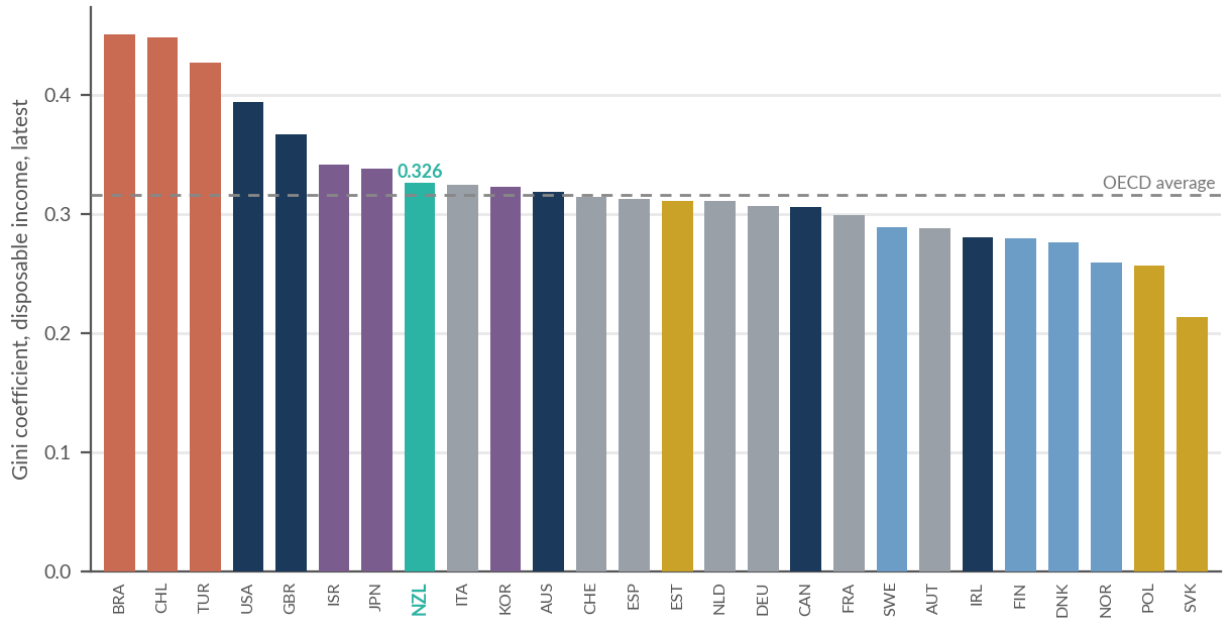
Source: ILO/OECD via World Bank

The NEET rate counts young people not in employment, education or training, the fullest measure of youthful detachment. New Zealand's 12.8% ranks ninth-highest of 26 countries, above the OECD average of 10.5%. India (25.6%), Turkey (23.0%) and Brazil (18.7%) lead, but the rich-world offenders are instructive: Britain at 14.4%, Canada at 13.3% and Austria at 13.4% all exceed New Zealand, while the Netherlands (4.1%), Sweden (5.6%) and Ireland (5.7%) show what the frontier looks like.

Australia's 8.5% is the pointed comparison, four points below New Zealand, or roughly one young New Zealander in twenty-five who would be studying or working if the country performed at Australian levels. The Dutch figure implies the gap could in principle be twice that.

NEET status is among the best-documented youth predictors of long-run benefit receipt, low wages and poor health, which is why this page belongs beside the welfare numbers of *New Zealand by Numbers* and the teenage-parenthood chart at 2.06. New Zealand's rate has improved only marginally since 2010. The Netherlands' 4.1% is not a statistical quirk; it is a comprehensive system of vocational pathways and youth benefit obligations. The gap between 12.8 and 4.1 looks more like policy than culture.

7.09 Income inequality



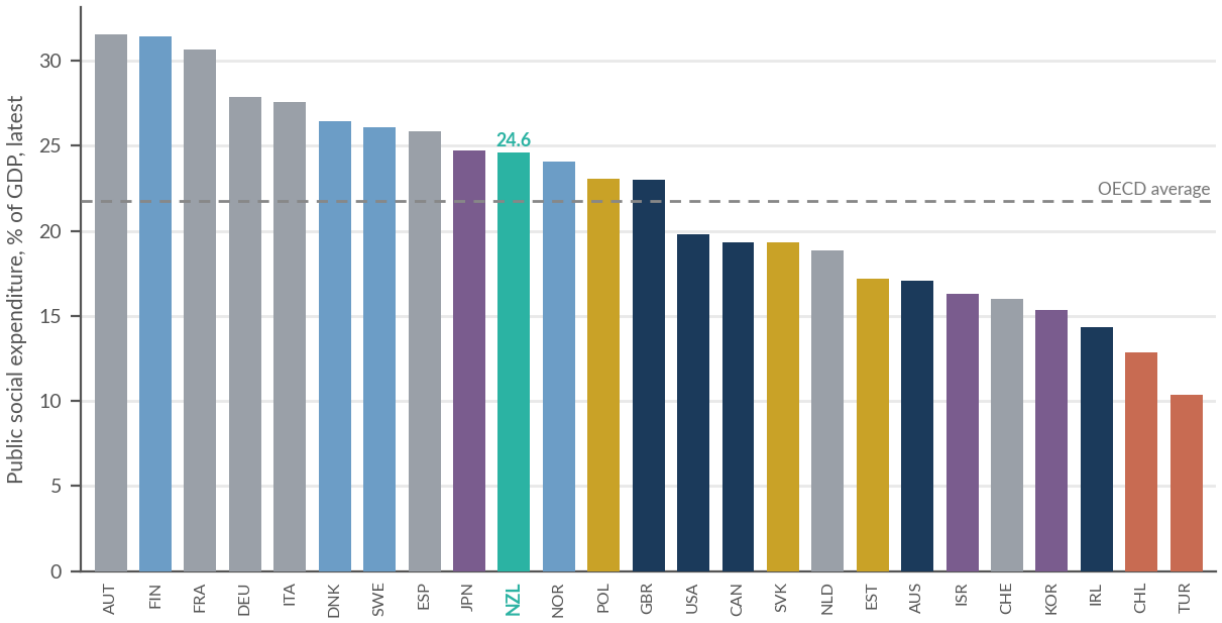
Source: OECD Income Distribution Database

New Zealand's Gini coefficient for disposable income, 0.33, is the eighth-highest of 26 countries, above the OECD average of 0.32. The most unequal societies here are Brazil and Chile (0.45) and Turkey (0.43), followed by the United States (0.39) and Britain (0.37). The most equal are Slovakia (0.21), Poland and Norway (0.26), with the Nordic bloc clustered just above.

New Zealand sits in the Anglosphere's middle: below Britain and America, beside Japan, a notch above Australia, and above Canada (0.31) and Ireland (0.28). The measure is disposable income, after taxes and transfers, so it already credits each country's redistribution; market income inequality would rank the welfare states far higher.

The change data confirm what Treasury analysis and *New Zealand by Numbers* both conclude: New Zealand's inequality has been essentially flat for three decades, at 0.34 in 2010 and 0.33 now, after the sharp one-off rise of the late 1980s. Britain drifted up over the same period; Australia held steady. The popular story of relentlessly widening gaps is not in the data, here or at home. What the data do show is a country a notch more unequal than the OECD norm, and stable there.

7.10 Social spending



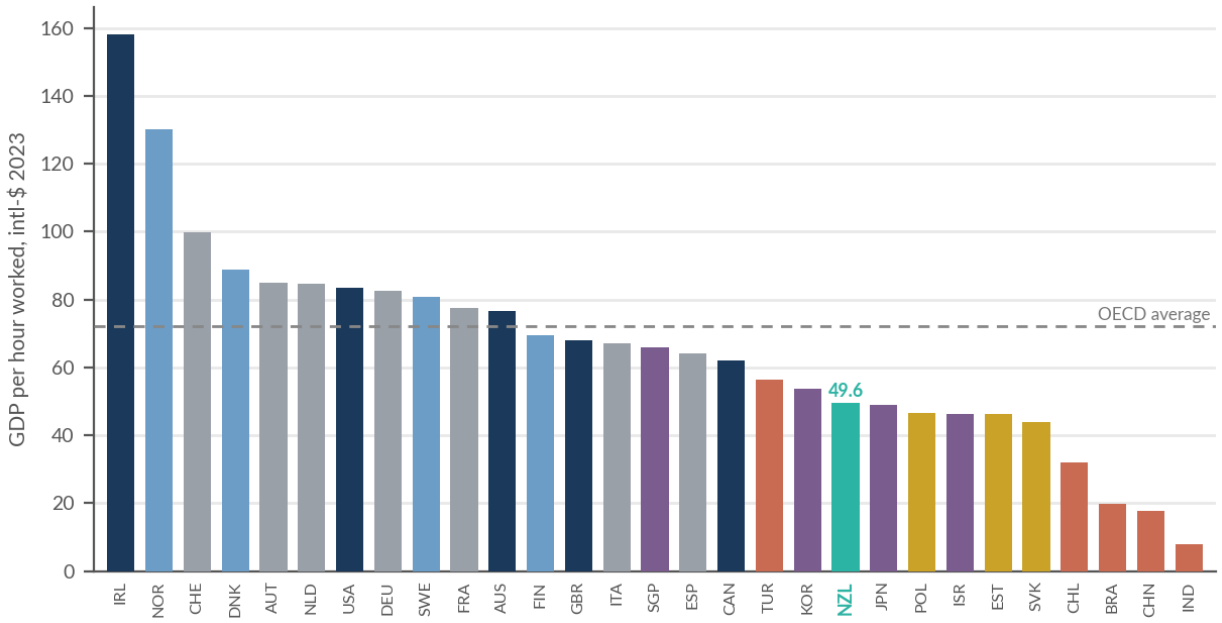
Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX)

New Zealand's public social spending, on pensions, benefits, health and social services, reached 24.6% of GDP in 2022, tenth of 25 countries and nearly three points above the OECD average of 21.8%. The great European welfare states head the chart, Austria and Finland above 31% and France at 30.7%. The low spenders are the Asian tigers, the Anglo settler states and two European outliers: South Korea at 15.3%, Ireland at 14.4%, Australia at 17.1%, Switzerland at 16.0%.

The surprise sits across the Tasman, and it runs the unexpected way. New Zealand spends seven and a half points of GDP more on social protection than Australia, a difference of roughly $30 billion a year at New Zealand's GDP. Australia's compulsory superannuation, which shifts retirement provision off the government's books, explains much of it; universal versus means-tested pension design explains most of the rest.

New Zealand spent 18.3% in 2000 and has added six points of GDP since, among the larger expansions on the chart, while Australia's share fell. Set beside the child poverty and NEET pages, the added spending makes less difference to outcomes than might be hoped. The welfare state's size, this book keeps finding, is a weak predictor of what it achieves.

7.11 Productivity



Source: Penn World Table via Our World in Data

In 2023, New Zealand produced 49.6 international dollars of output per hour worked, 20th of 29 countries, a whisker above Japan, below South Korea and 31% below the OECD average of 72.1. Ireland's 158 is a foreign-ownership distortion best ignored; the meaningful leaders are Norway (130), Switzerland (100), Denmark (89) and the United States (84). Australia stands at 76.8, 55% above New Zealand.

New Zealand's relative position was far higher within living memory. In 1970 New Zealand produced 23.9 dollars per hour and Britain 23.9, exactly level; Australia was 30% ahead. Britain now leads New Zealand by 37% and Australia by 55%. The fall has a shape: the ground against Britain was lost almost entirely between 1970 and the mid-1980s, behind protective walls; the reforms of 1984-93 arrested the slide and briefly recovered ground on Australia; the decades since have held station against Britain while slipping against Australia again. What compounds now is quieter: capital per worker, firm scale, land-use rules and diffuse know-how, each a little worse than the peers, every year.

Every disappointing chart in this book eventually leads back to this one. The wage gap at 7.05, the emigration at 1.08, the fiscal strain of Chapter 8 and the housing scarcity of Chapter 9 are all, at bottom, claims on output per hour that New Zealand does not produce. The country's participation, hours and employment are already world-class; there is little labour left to add. What remains is the value of each hour, and its ingredients, capital per worker, competition, land-use rules and scale through openness, are the ones this book's other charts have priced. They are also the standing agenda of *Prescription for Prosperity 2026*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Economy

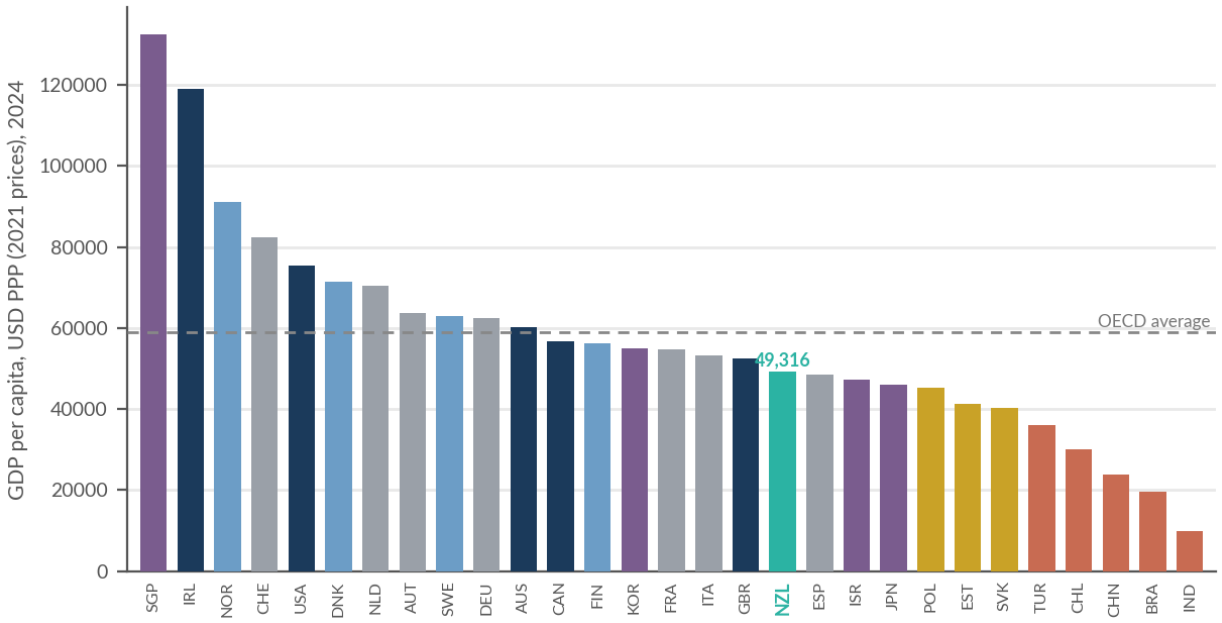
Fifty years ago New Zealand had one of the highest incomes per person on earth. The tables in this chapter measure what has happened since, and the summary is not a smooth slide but a story with a break in it: stagnation into the early 1980s, crisis, sweeping reform, then partial recovery. The picture today: 18th of 29 in income per head, 20th in recent growth, 20th in productivity. New Zealand has become a mid-table developed economy, and mid-table, in a league that includes Poland and Estonia climbing fast from below, is not a stable place to rest.

The chapter also measures the machinery. Some of it runs well: inflation is back near target and close to the pack median, public debt remains moderate by rich-world standards, the tax system raises a middling share of GDP with an unusually clean base, and the fiscal books, whatever their recent strains, would be the envy of Washington, Paris or Tokyo. New Zealand's macroeconomic plumbing, the world's first inflation target among its fittings, remains largely sound.

The structural pages are less comfortable. For a small country at the end of the world, New Zealand trades remarkably little: exports and imports sum to barely half of GDP, 22nd of 29 and less than a third of what small European economies manage. Its exports are unusually simple, ranking 26th on economic complexity, and unusually concentrated, with a quarter going to one customer. Foreign investment, the classic remedy for thin domestic capital, sits below the OECD norm behind one of its more restrictive screening regimes.

Two ways of reading the chapter compete. One says geography did this: distance and 5 million people explain the thin trade, the simple exports, the low complexity. The other notes that Chile exports copper, Norway oil and Australia iron ore, while Singapore, equally small, trades more than three times its income. Geography deals the hand; policy plays it. The gap between those two readings is the New Zealand economic debate, and these fifteen pages are its scoreboard.

8.01 Income



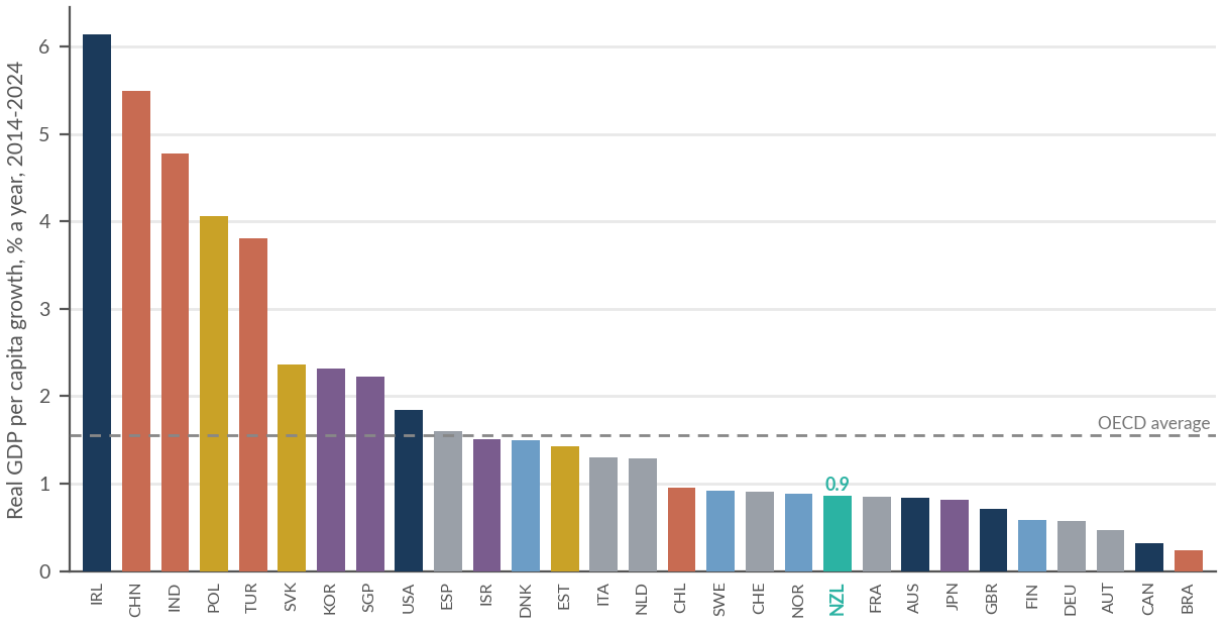
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

Measured at purchasing power parity, New Zealand's income per head was about US$49,300 in 2024, 18th of 29 countries and 16% below the OECD average. Singapore (US$132,600) and Ireland (US$119,000) top the chart, both inflated by tax-resident profits, so the meaningful leaders are Norway (US$91,100), Switzerland (US$82,300) and the United States (US$75,500). Australia stands at US$60,300, 22% ahead of New Zealand; Britain at US$52,600, 7% ahead.

The changes since 2000 tell a different story from the level. In growth terms New Zealand, up 37%, matched the United States and edged Australia; the dollar gaps widened only because richer countries add more dollars at the same rate. The relegation since 2000 has come from below: South Korea passed New Zealand during the period, and Poland, at US$45,200, now sits within about four thousand dollars, having started the century less than half as rich. On current trajectories the crossover comes within a decade.

A country that ranked among the very richest in the world for income per head in the 1950s now ranks 37th globally, as the OECD survey cited in *New Zealand by Numbers* records. Nothing in this chart is destiny; South Korea and the Baltics have shown how fast the table can be climbed. But the climb is a productivity story, and 7.11 has already shown where New Zealand stands on that.

8.02 Growth



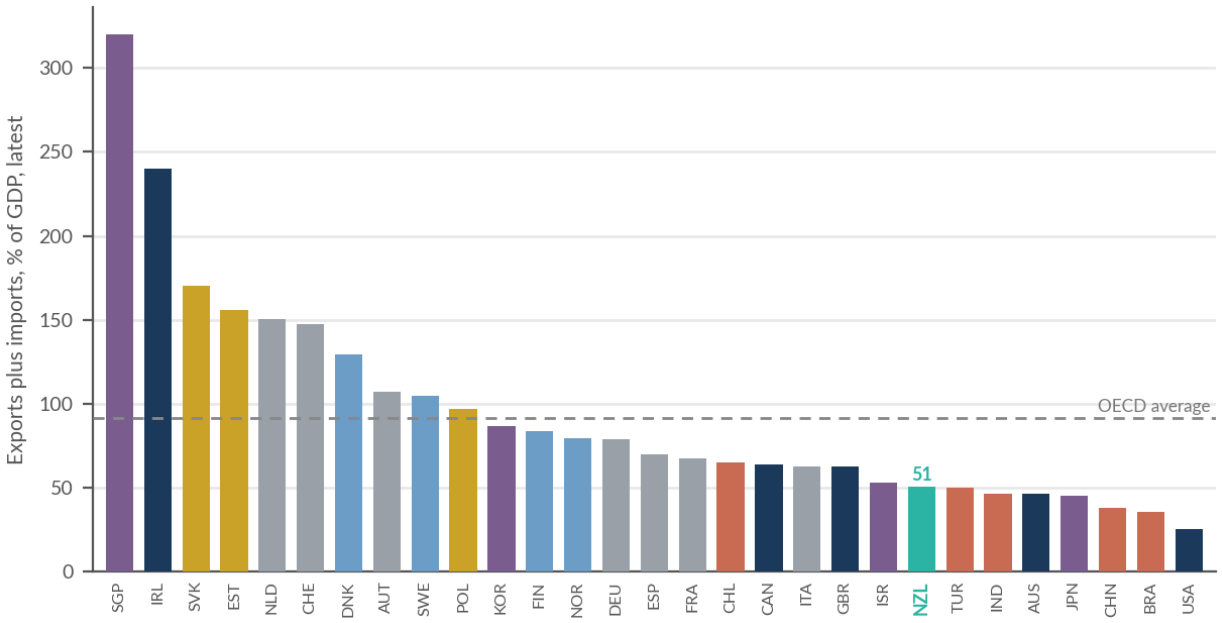
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

Over the decade to 2024, New Zealand's real GDP per person grew 0.9% a year, 20th of 29 countries and well below the OECD average of 1.6%. The catch-up economies dominate the top: Ireland's 6.1% is an accounting mirage, but China (5.5%), India (4.8%), Poland (4.1%) and Turkey (3.8%) are real. Among the mature economies, the United States' 1.9% stands out, half a point clear of nearly every peer.

The bottom third is a rich-country parking lot: Canada (0.3%), Austria (0.5%), Germany (0.6%), Finland (0.6%), Britain (0.7%) and, barely ahead of them, Australia (0.8%) and New Zealand (0.9%). The Anglosphere's per-capita stagnation is partly a composition effect: fast population growth lifts total GDP faster than output per head, leaving per-capita growth thin, in Canada's case near zero.

That is the caution New Zealand's headline growth debate usually skips. A country adding 1.7% to its population, as Chapter 1 showed, can post respectable GDP growth while its citizens' individual incomes barely move, and that is roughly what the past decade delivered. The per-person line is the one that pays wages, funds hospitals and decides whether the airport queue at 1.08 lengthens. On that line, New Zealand has just spent a decade near the back of the developed pack.

8.03 Trade openness



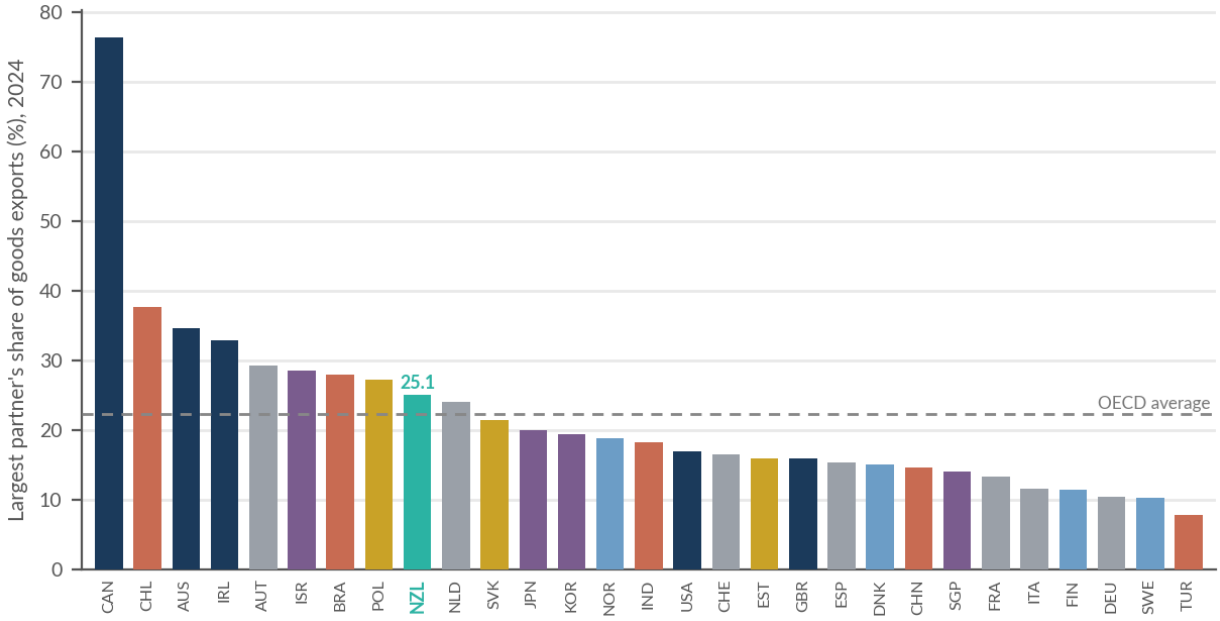
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

Add exports to imports and New Zealand's trade equals 51% of GDP, 22nd of 29 countries, barely half the OECD average of 92% and the lowest figure among the small advanced economies by a wide margin. The comparison that matters is with the other smalls: Singapore trades at 320% of GDP, Ireland at 240%, Slovakia at 170%, Estonia at 156%, the Netherlands at 150%, Denmark at 129%. Small countries prosper by specialising and trading; that is the only model that has ever worked for them.

The giants can afford introversion, America trades at 25% of GDP and China at 38%, because their internal markets supply the scale that trade otherwise provides. New Zealand has no internal market of consequence, yet trades like a continental economy: barely ahead of Australia, below Japan's neighbourhood in kind, and, strikingly, less than it did in 2000, when the ratio was 69%.

Distance explains part of the shortfall; it cannot on its own explain the decline, since distance has not grown, though the goods the world trades have shifted in ways that penalise remoteness. Services exports lost to the border years, a dollar that has traded strong against fundamentals and, on this book's reading, a planning and investment regime that starves the tradeable sector all contribute. For a five-million-person economy, trade is the growth model itself, and this chart says it points the wrong way.

8.04 Export concentration



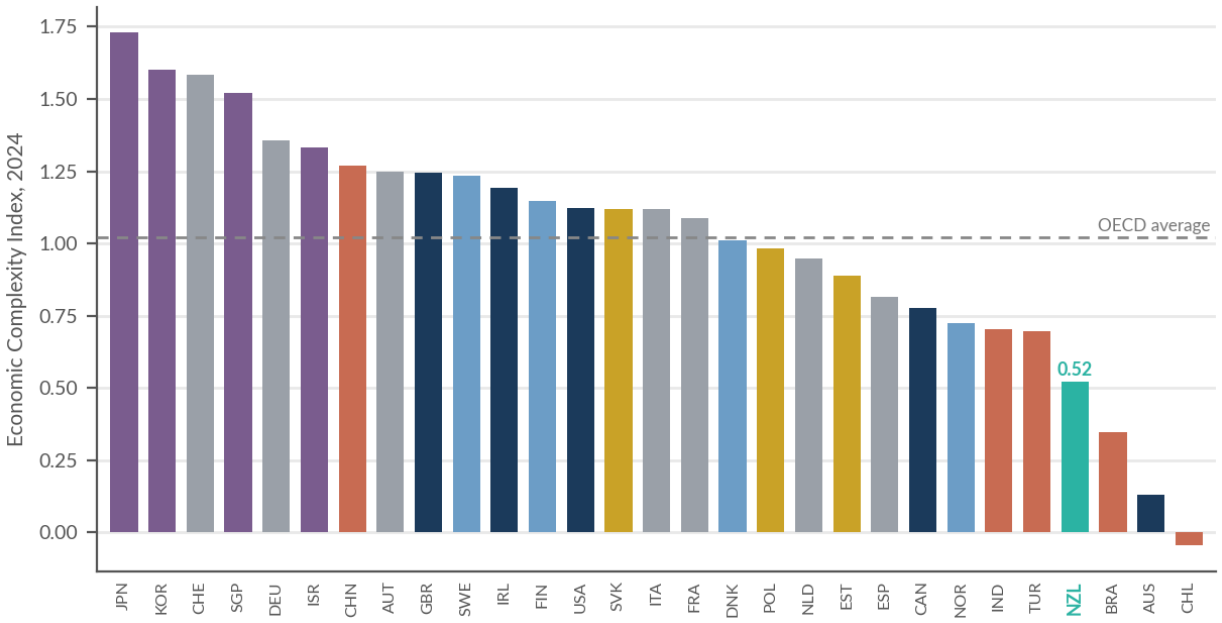
Source: IMF, International Merchandise Trade Statistics

One customer, China, takes 25.1% of New Zealand's goods exports, the ninth-highest single-partner concentration of the 29 countries. Canada is the extreme case, sending 76.5% of its exports to the United States, followed by Chile (37.8% to China), Australia (34.6% to China) and Ireland (32.9% to the United States). The diversified traders cluster at the bottom: Turkey's largest partner takes just 7.8%, Sweden's 10.3%, Germany's 10.5%.

Concentration is the price of proximity to a big buyer, and it is not automatically a vice: Canada has prospered for a century on its exposure. But the identity of the partner matters. New Zealand, Australia and Chile depend on a market that has demonstrated, in Australia's case with barley, wine and lobster, its willingness to weaponise access during political disputes. A quarter of goods exports is roughly 5% of New Zealand's GDP staked on one government's goodwill.

New Zealand has been here before, and the memory is institutional: Britain took 36% of exports in 1970 and the preferential access began to be phased out from 1973, the founding trauma that *New Zealand by Numbers* recounts. The lesson learned then, diversify before you must, has been half-unlearned in the China boom. The free trade agreements now in force with Europe and Britain are the available insurance; how far exporters use them will decide whether the lesson stays learned.

8.05 Economic complexity



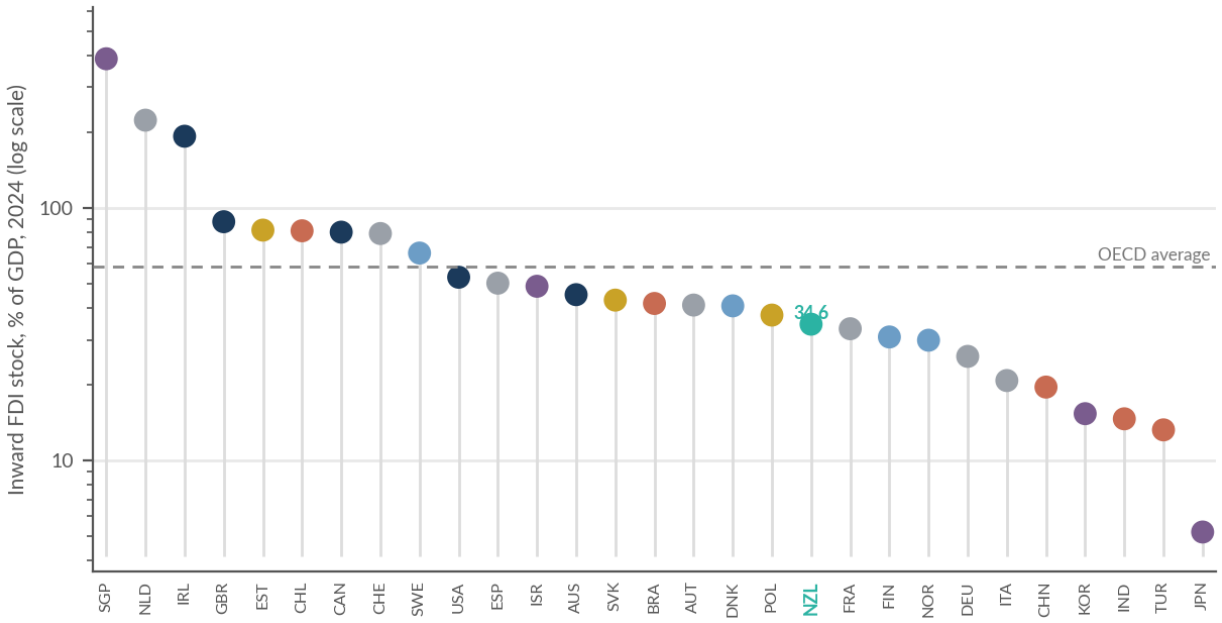
Source: Harvard Growth Lab, Atlas of Economic Complexity

The Economic Complexity Index measures how sophisticated and varied a country's exports are, and it is the least flattering economic chart in this book. New Zealand ranks 26th of 29, ahead of only Brazil, Australia and Chile, with a score of 0.52 against Japan's 1.73, South Korea's 1.60 and Switzerland's 1.58. Globally, Harvard's Atlas places New Zealand around 49th, among developing economies, an extraordinary position for a country of New Zealand's income and institutions.

The index rewards making many things that few countries can make. New Zealand exports superbly produced simple things: milk powder, meat, timber, fruit. The presence of Australia (0.13) and Chile (-0.04) at the very bottom shows the commodity-exporter pattern, and Norway (0.73) shows oil doing the same to a sophisticated society. But Denmark and the Netherlands, agricultural exporters both, score 1.01 and 0.95, proof that food need not mean simple: they export the machines, enzymes and genetics behind the food as well as the food.

Complexity predicts future growth better than almost any single indicator, which is why the ranking matters. New Zealand's score has drifted down since 2000, from 0.62. The Danish route, upgrading within the pastoral cluster rather than abandoning it, is the plausible one, and pockets of it exist, from dairy genetics to agritech. The chart measures how far there is to go.

8.06 Foreign direct investment



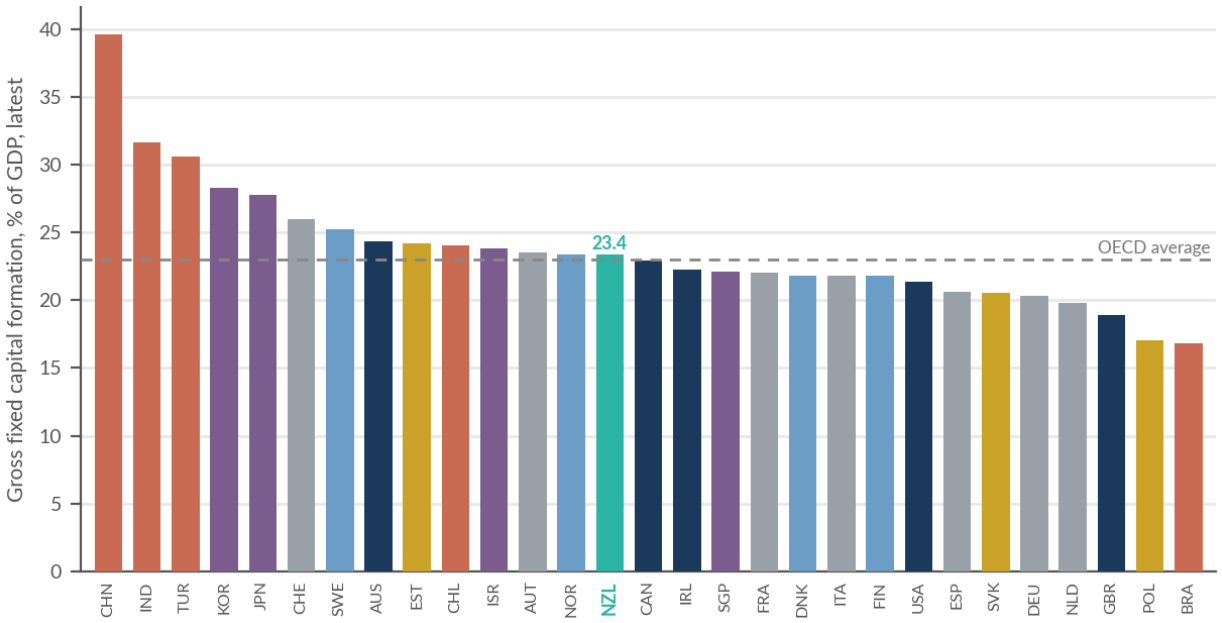
Source: UNCTAD; World Bank

The stock of foreign direct investment in New Zealand equals 34.6% of GDP, 19th of 29 countries and well below the OECD average of 58%. The entrepôt economies head the chart, Singapore at 389%, the Netherlands at 222%, Ireland at 192%, and the chart is drawn on a logarithmic scale to keep them from crushing everyone else. The meaningful peers also rank well ahead: Estonia and Chile above 81%, Canada at 80%, Sweden at 66%, Australia at 45%. Below New Zealand sit mostly the large closed economies, Japan at 5.2% marking the floor.

For a capital-shallow country, the ranking is the wrong one. For the measured sector at least, New Zealand's productivity problem is, in large part, a capital-per-worker problem, and foreign investment is how small countries import capital, technology and management at scale. Yet New Zealand maintains one of the OECD's more restrictive investment screening regimes, a finding the OECD's FDI restrictiveness work has repeated for years, and the FDI stock ranking shows it.

The politics and the economics of this page point in opposite directions, in New Zealand as in most countries. Selling assets to foreigners is unpopular; being poor is also unpopular, but on a longer fuse. Ireland and Estonia, two of the countries in this book that most deliberately courted foreign capital, are also the two that climbed the GDP table fastest. The 2024-25 liberalisation of New Zealand's screening rules is a first test of whether the lesson has landed.

8.07 Investment



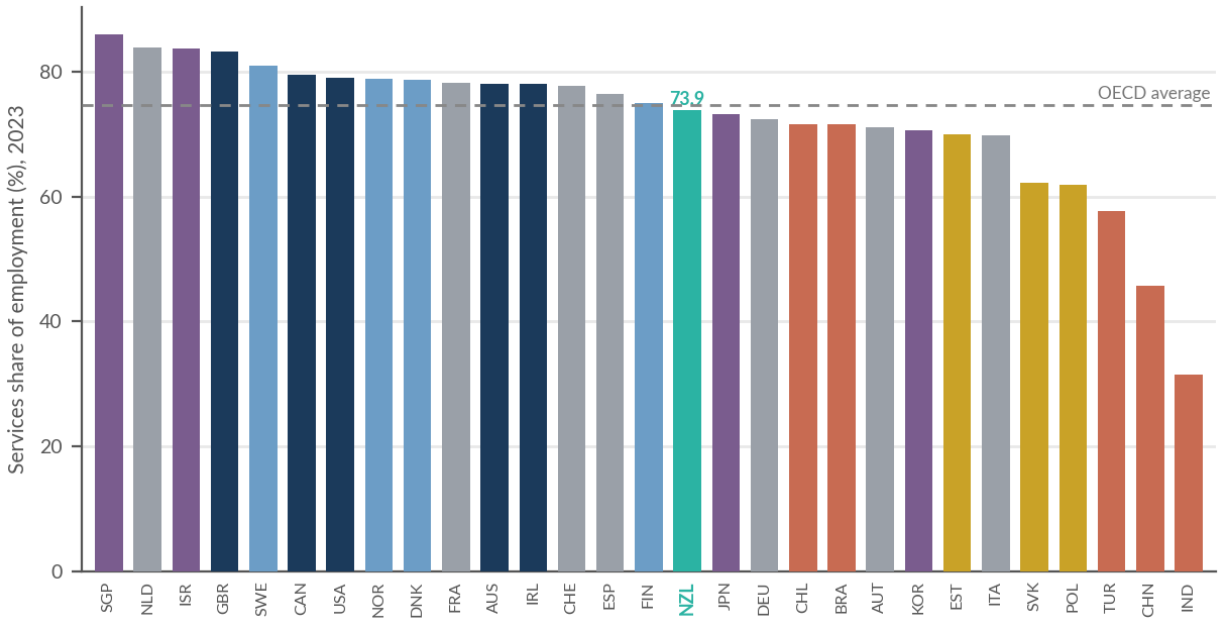
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

New Zealand invests 23.4% of GDP in fixed capital, 14th of 29 countries and a fraction above the OECD average of 23.0%. The great accumulators are the Asian economies, China at 39.7%, India at 31.7%, South Korea at 28.3%, with Turkey (30.6%) alongside. The rich-world floor belongs to Britain (18.9%) and Poland (17.0%), with Brazil (16.8%) lowest of all. Australia invests 24.3%, a point above New Zealand.

Mid-table on this chart is better than New Zealand's critics might expect, and the change column is respectable too: up from 20.9% in 2000 while America and Australia drifted down. The catch is composition. A large share of New Zealand's investment has gone into dwellings, real and necessary capital, but capital that lifts industry productivity only indirectly, and much of what the price boom of Chapter 9 recorded was dearer land, a transfer between buyers and sellers rather than capital formed. Business investment per worker, the measure that drives 7.11, remains among the OECD's weakest, a finding the OECD's New Zealand surveys repeat with each edition.

So the chart carries a caution about aggregates. A normal investment share can coexist with capital-shallow firms, and New Zealand's shallowness traces less to houses absorbing the savings pool than to the investment screening of 8.06, thin capital markets and a company tax rate 8.13 shows above the OECD norm. The quality of the public share matters too: the Infrastructure Commission's cost findings at 8.15 apply to the state's own projects above all.

8.08 Employment by sector



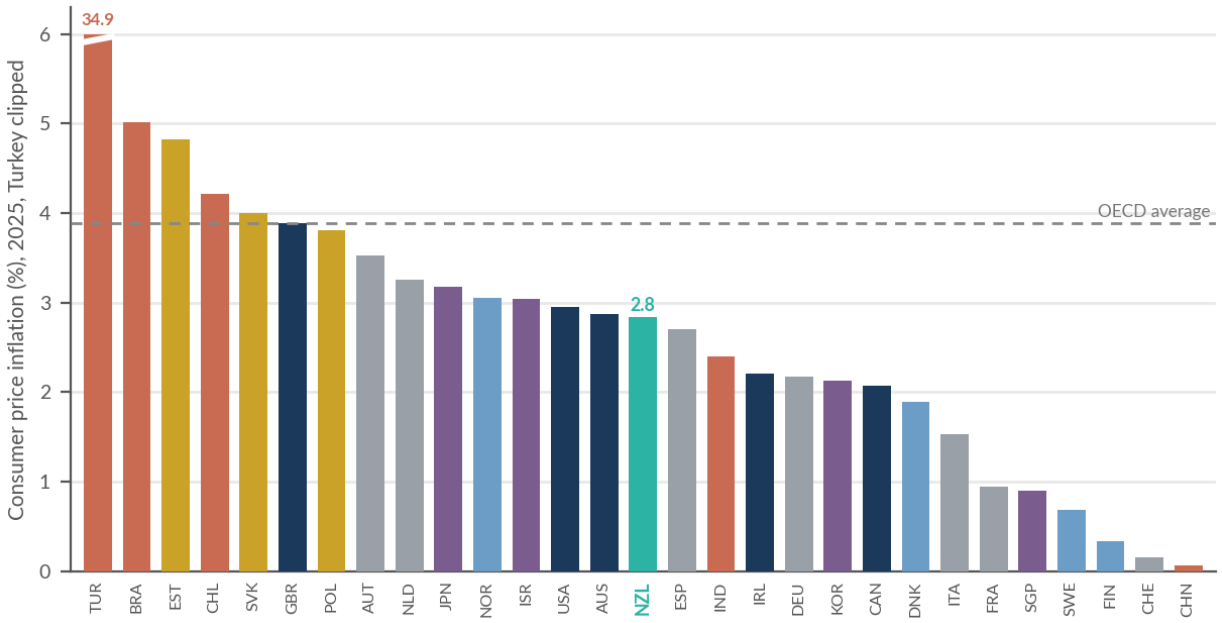
Source: ILO modelled estimates via World Bank

Services employ 73.9% of working New Zealanders, 16th of 29 countries and close to the OECD average of 74.7%. The post-industrial extreme is Singapore (86.1%), the Netherlands (83.9%), Israel (83.8%) and Britain (83.2%). At the other end, India remains 31.5% services and 42% agricultural, China 45.8% services, and the manufacturing redoubts of Central Europe, Slovakia and Poland at about 62%, keep industry's share high by rich-world standards.

New Zealand's remaining distinctiveness is the primary sector: farming, forestry and fishing still employ about 6% of its workforce, several times Britain's share, and industry including construction about 20%. The structural transformation that *New Zealand by Numbers* traces from 1901 has converged on the standard rich-country shape, a couple of points less service-heavy than the Anglosphere norm.

The convergence hides the question that matters, which is not the sectoral mix but the quality within it. Britain's 83% services include the City of London; New Zealand's 74% include a large hospitality and retail economy serving domestic demand. As the productivity chapter concluded, what a country's services can sell to the world, not how many people they employ, determines whether the post-industrial shape pays post-industrial wages.

8.09 Inflation



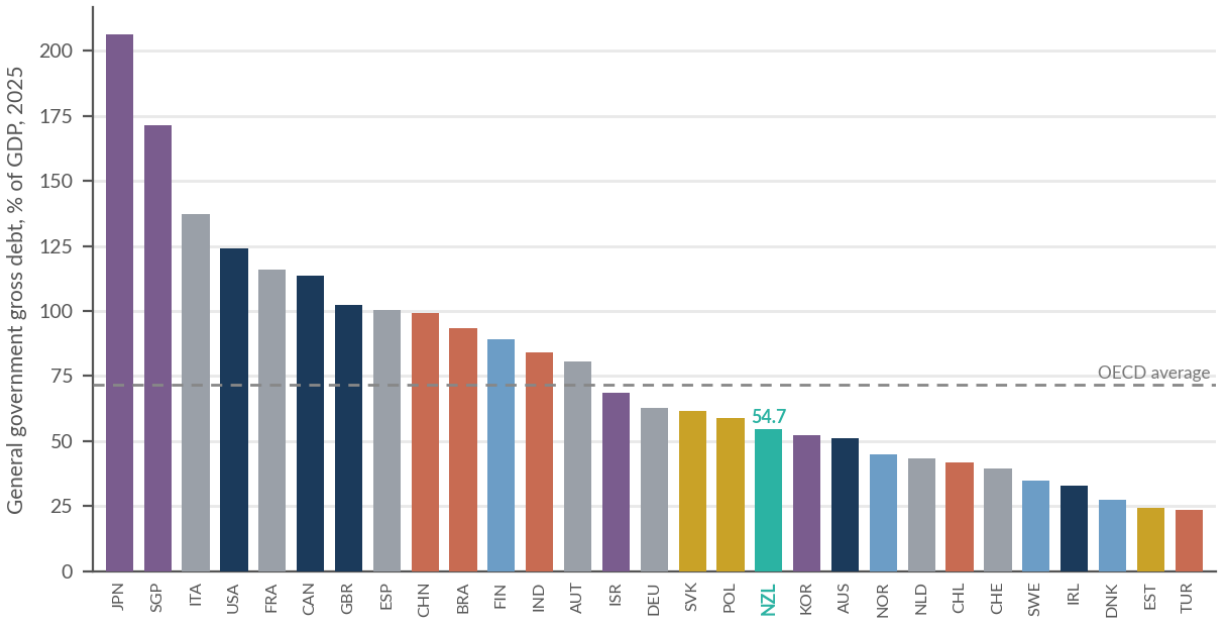
Source: World Bank; IMF

New Zealand's consumer prices rose 2.8% in 2025, 15th of 29 countries and inside its 1% to 3% target band, against an OECD average pushed to 3.9% by Turkey's 34.9%, whose bar the chart clips. The post-pandemic disinflation has matured: excluding Turkey, every country on the chart sits between China's 0.1% and Brazil's 5.0%, with the English-speaking countries spread between Canada's 2.1% and Britain's 3.9%.

The chart flatters recent policy everywhere while concealing the episode that preceded it. New Zealand's inflation peaked above 7% in 2022, its worst in three decades, and the same spike hit every inflation-targeting country within a percentage point or two of the same time. How much of each country's surge was imported and how much was manufactured by its own central bank remains contested, and New Zealand's post-mortems have found plenty of domestic error.

New Zealand pioneered formal inflation targeting in 1989, as *New Zealand by Numbers* recounts, and the framework spread across the developed world: nearly every OECD country on this chart now runs some version of it, Denmark's euro peg the standing exception, and the two-decade average inflation rate of nearly all of them sits between 1.5% and 3%. The 2021-23 surge was the framework's sternest test. On this evidence the framework bent, cost a cycle of real incomes, and held.

8.10 Government debt

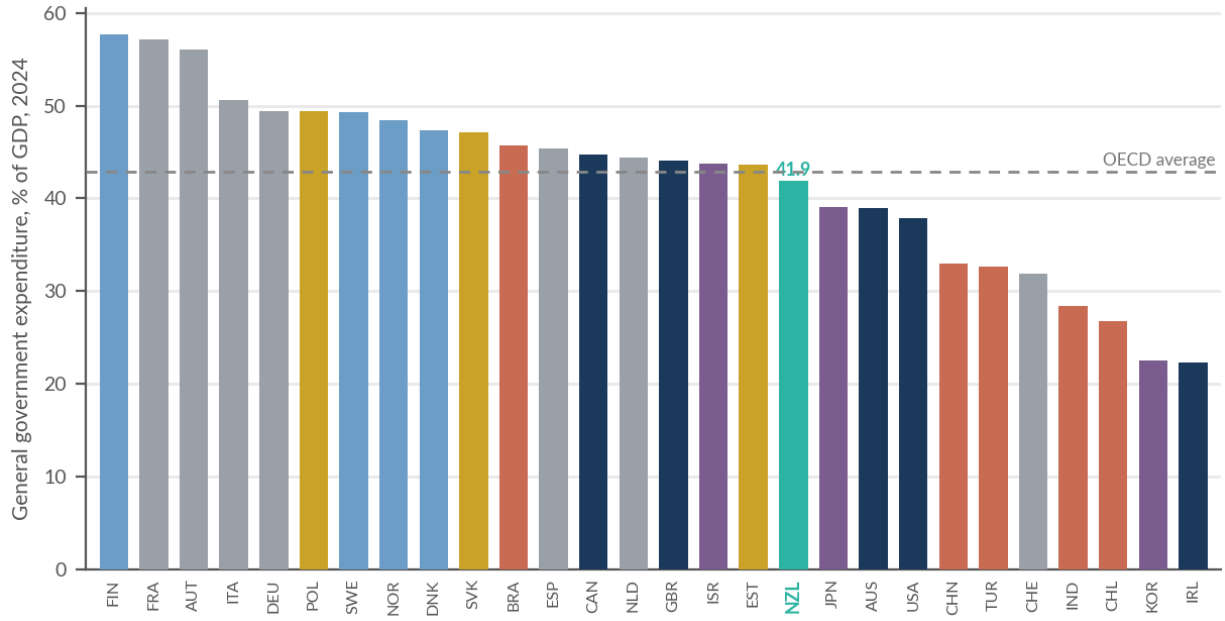


Source: IMF World Economic Outlook

New Zealand's general government gross debt stands at 54.7% of GDP, 18th of 29 countries and well below the OECD average of 71.7%. The heavily indebted are the world's biggest economies: Japan at 206%, Italy at 137%, the United States at 124%, France at 116%, Britain at 102%. The frugal club is dominated by small states: Estonia (24.2%), Denmark (27.5%), Ireland (32.9%), Sweden (34.9%) and, notably, Norway (45.0%) with its trillion-dollar asset side unshown.

Australia, at 51.0%, sits beside New Zealand, and both countries' change columns point the same way: from single-digit or teen debt ratios in 2007 to the fifties now, a rise driven by the financial crisis, earthquakes in New Zealand's case, and above all the pandemic. Britain and the United States doubled from already-high bases over the same period. Moderate debt is New Zealand's fiscal inheritance and its insurance policy: a small, shock-prone economy at the end of the world cannot borrow like America when the earthquake or pandemic arrives unless it starts low. That logic, hard-learned in 1984 and articulated in *New Zealand by Numbers*, is why the difference between 55% and drift towards 70% matters more here than the same fifteen points would in Frankfurt or Washington.

8.11 Government spending



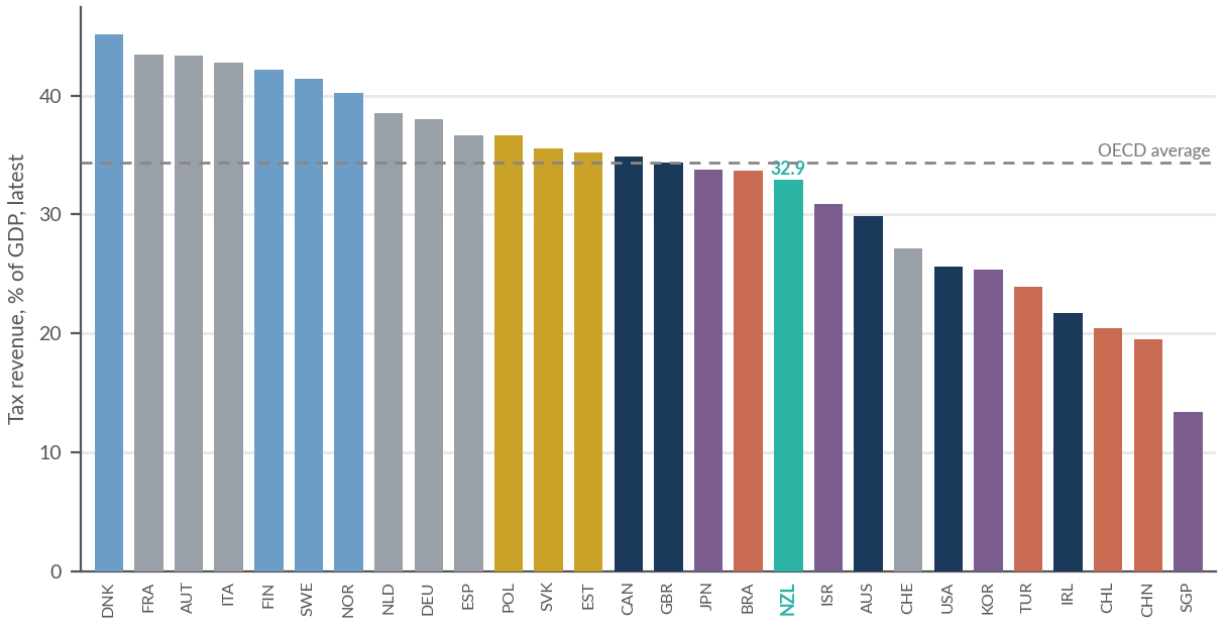
Source: IMF; national accounts

General government in New Zealand, central and local together, spends 41.9% of GDP, 18th of 28 countries and a point below the OECD average of 42.9%. The European social states run far larger: Finland and France above 57%, Austria at 56%, Italy above 50%. The small-state end belongs to Ireland (22.3%, on distorted GDP), South Korea (22.5%), Chile (26.7%) and Switzerland (31.9%). Australia spends 38.9%, the United States 37.9%.

New Zealand is thus a middling-sized state, pretending, in its political rhetoric, to be either a Scandinavian one or a minimal one depending on the speaker. It is neither. The change since 2000 is a creep of three and a half points of GDP, close to Australia's, less than Britain's seven, in line with what ageing alone would predict, and the same ratchet that *New Zealand by Numbers* documents around COVID appears in nearly every country on the chart.

The cross-country evidence on size and prosperity is inconveniently mixed for both political camps: Switzerland thrives at 32% and Denmark at 47%. What the successful spenders share is not scale but discipline about what the money buys, a distinction Chapter 11's government effectiveness page picks up. On this chart, New Zealand's problem is not that its state is unusually large by current standards. It is that a middling state is being asked to fund a Nordic set of promises from a mid-table income base, and Chapter 1's ageing arithmetic is about to raise the bill.

8.12 Tax burden



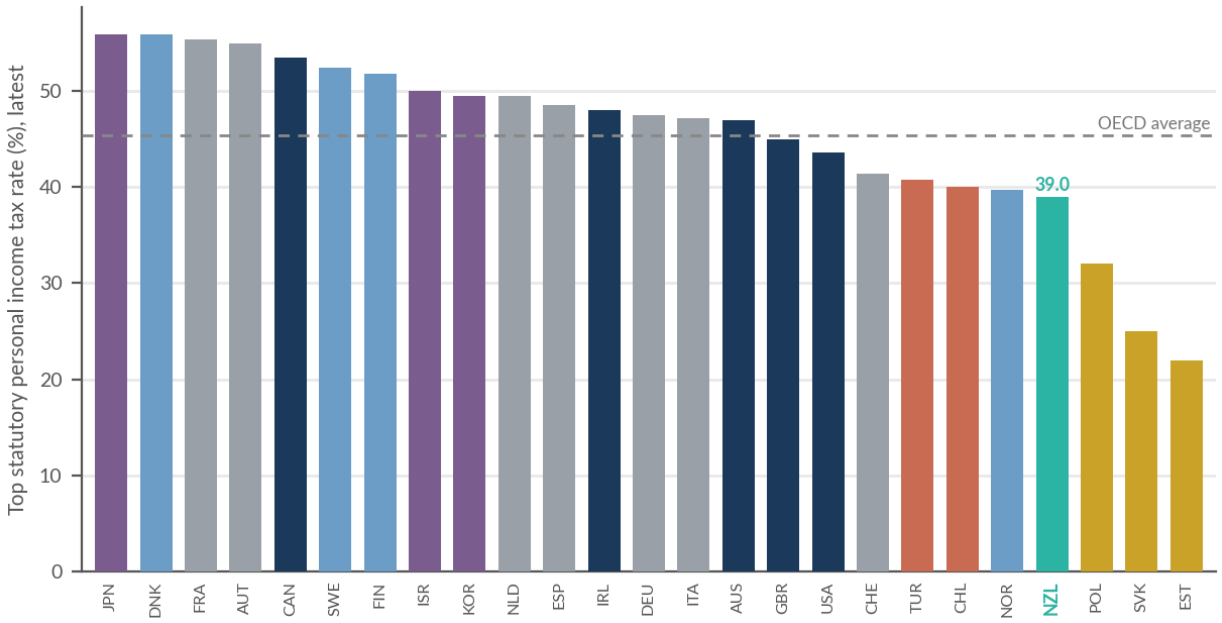
Source: OECD Global Revenue Statistics

New Zealand's total tax take is 32.9% of GDP, 18th of 28 countries and a point and a half below the average across this book's OECD members of 34.4%. Denmark leads at 45.2%, with France, Austria, Italy, Finland and Sweden all above 41%. The light-tax jurisdictions are Singapore (13.4%), Chile (20.5%), Ireland (21.7%) and the United States (25.6%). Australia collects 29.9%, three points less than New Zealand.

The level is unremarkable by current standards; the structure is not. New Zealand raises its 33% with no general capital gains tax, no social security contributions, no inheritance tax and a GST with almost no exemptions, a base-broad, rate-low design that tax economists routinely rank among the world's cleanest. The countries above it on the chart typically stack payroll charges on labour that New Zealand does not levy; Australia's lower figure excludes compulsory superannuation, which is private saving rather than tax but weighs on payrolls much as a 12% levy would.

Stability is the other New Zealand signature: 32.5% in 2000, 32.9% now, a generation of political combat over tax that moved the dial less than half a point. The pressures of Chapter 1 will test that equilibrium, since the pension and health promises embedded in current law imply a rising take on unchanged settings. The design question, what to tax, will matter more than the headline number.

8.13 Top tax rates



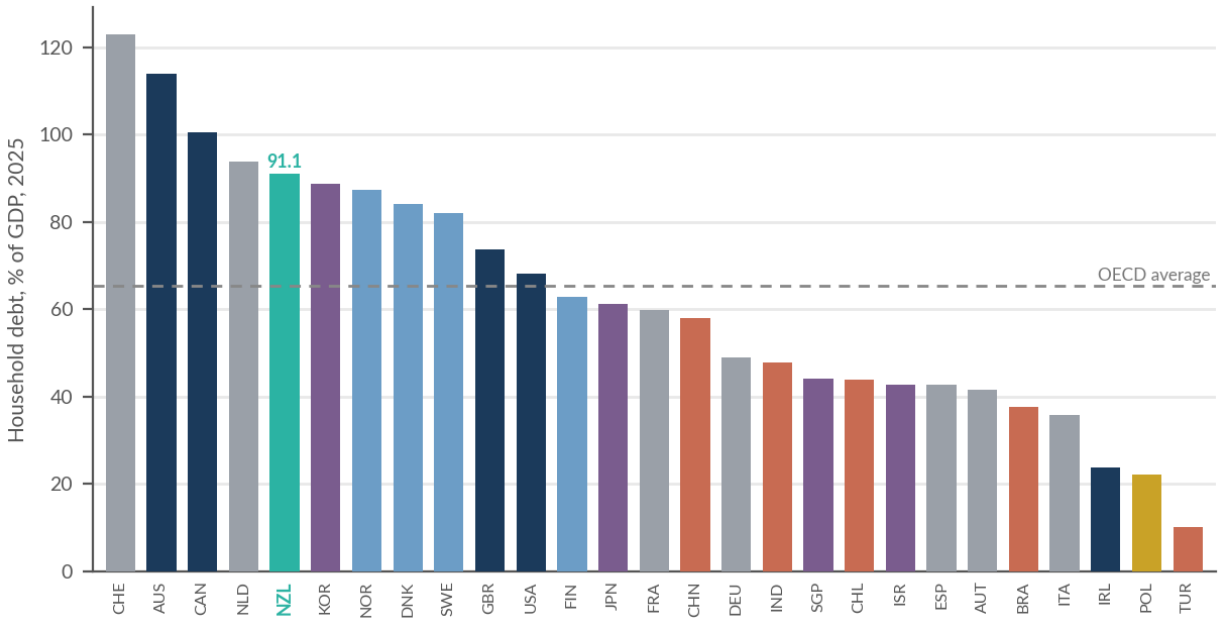
Source: OECD Tax Database

New Zealand's top statutory income tax rate of 39% is the fourth-lowest of 25 countries, ahead of only Poland (32%), Slovakia (25%) and Estonia (22%). The high-rate jurisdictions, counting national and sub-national layers, are Japan (56.0%), Denmark (55.9%), France (55.4%) and Austria (55.0%). Australia's 47% including levies, Britain's 45% and America's 43.7% federal-state combination all exceed New Zealand's top rate, Britain's and Australia's by six points or more.

Two features distinguish the New Zealand settings beyond the rate itself. The 39% threshold bites at barely twice the average wage, among the lowest multiples in the OECD, so the top rate reaches deep into professional salaries rather than marking out genuine top earners. And the company rate of 28% sits above the OECD's post-reform norm, in a world where Ireland charges 12.5%, 15% for the largest multinationals under the new global minimum tax, and the median has drifted towards the low twenties.

The comparative history runs through every country on this chart: top rates of 60% to 80% in 1980, the great flattening of the Reagan-Lawson-Douglas era, then a partial rebound. New Zealand's own journey from 66% to 39%, told in *New Zealand by Numbers*, is the pattern in miniature. What the chart cannot show is what each rate raises: high-rate France and low-rate New Zealand collect similar shares of GDP from income taxes, a reminder that bases, thresholds and avoidance do most of the work the rates get credit for.

8.14 Household debt



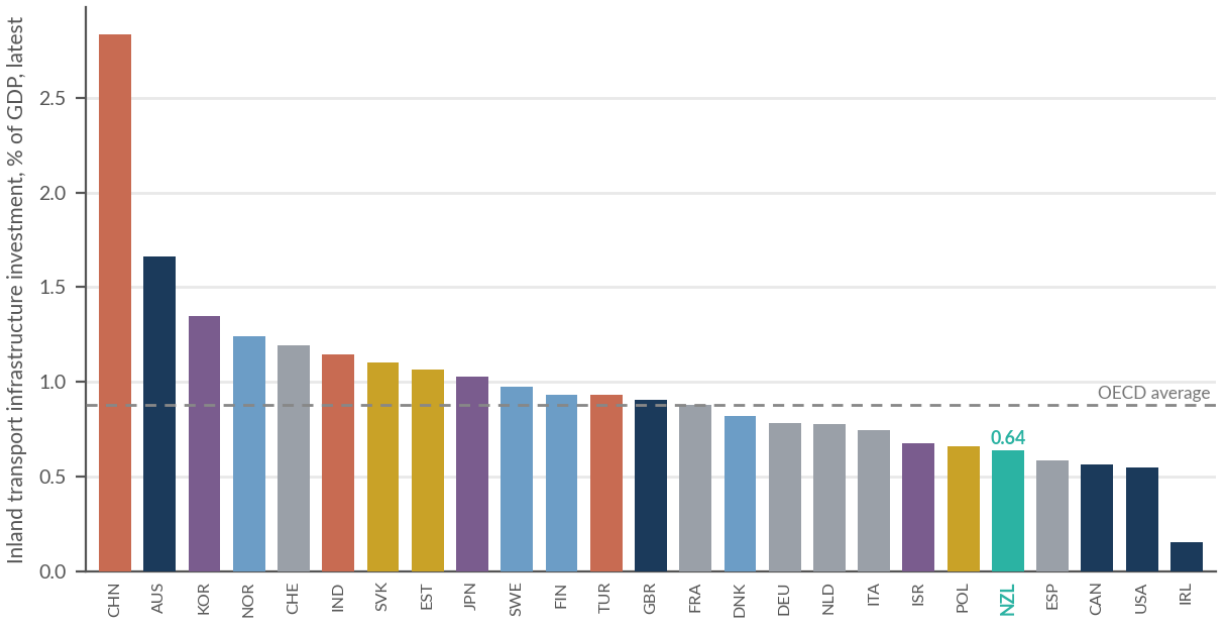
Source: Bank for International Settlements

New Zealand households owe debt equal to 91.1% of GDP, the fifth-highest burden of 27 countries and far above the OECD average of 65.3%. The leverage league is headed by Switzerland (123%), Australia (114%), Canada (101%) and the Netherlands (94%), and its membership is no accident: every country at the top combines expensive housing with sophisticated mortgage markets. The low-debt world, Turkey (10%), Poland (22%), Ireland (24%), Italy (36%), borrows little because it either cannot or need not.

The mechanism is the housing market, here as in every high-ranking country. New Zealand household debt rose from 62% of GDP in 2000 to 91% now, tracking house prices almost exactly, while Germany, where prices stagnated for decades, sits at 49%. Australia's 114% is the shadow of the only housing boom in the Anglosphere longer than New Zealand's.

The high debt stock is the shadow of shortage-driven house prices, and it has induced a decade of financial regulation in response: the loan-to-value and debt-to-income rules recorded in *New Zealand by Numbers*, rules that treat the symptom and whose costs fall not least on first-time buyers. Interest rates transmit to spending faster and harder in a 91%-debt economy than in a 49% one, as the 2022-24 tightening demonstrated on both sides of the Tasman.

8.15 Infrastructure investment



Source: OECD International Transport Forum

On the only harmonised measure available, investment in inland transport infrastructure, roads and rail, New Zealand committed about 0.64% of GDP a year over recent years, 21st of 25 countries and below the OECD average of 0.9%. China's 2.8% leads inevitably; Australia's 1.66% is the striking one, two and a half times New Zealand's share, the fiscal footprint of its decade-long pipeline of urban rail and motorway megaprojects. Norway (1.24%) and Switzerland (1.19%) show how mountain countries pay for geography.

The measure covers transport investment only, excludes maintenance, and treats countries' reporting practices as more comparable than they are. New Zealand's water, electricity and social infrastructure spending appears nowhere on this chart, and the domestic evidence, marshalled by the Infrastructure Commission, is that New Zealand's total infrastructure spending is respectable by OECD standards while its cost per unit built is not.

That reframing matters, because the political instinct in every infrastructure debate is to spend more. The comparative record suggests New Zealand's binding constraint is what a dollar buys: consenting delay, project churn and per-kilometre construction costs that the Infrastructure Commission's benchmarking places near the top of the developed world. Australia's 1.66% has bought Australia a construction cost crisis of its own. The scarce input is not money but the capability to turn money into assets, and no chart in this book can measure that directly.

CHAPTER NINE

Housing

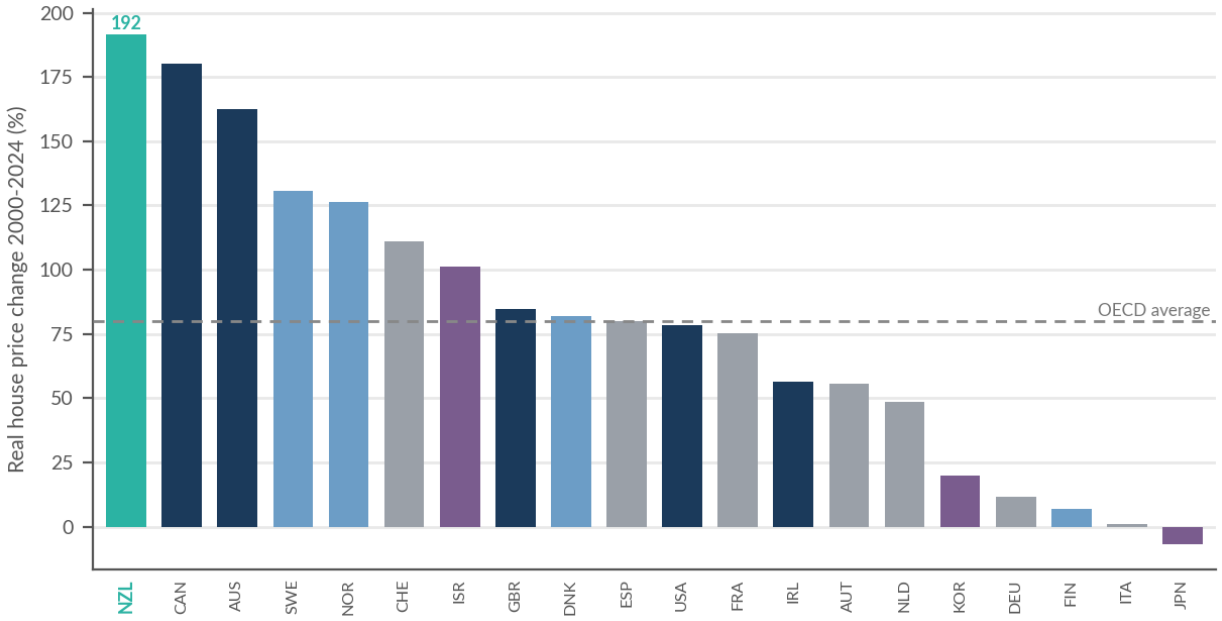
No New Zealand failure is better known abroad than its housing market, and the first chart in this chapter shows the reputation is earned: no country in this book saw real house prices rise further this century. Between 2000 and 2025, New Zealand house prices rose 192% after inflation, ahead of Canada's 180% and Australia's 162%, and roughly two and a half times the rich-world average. Set against incomes, the deterioration was the third-worst measured.

The rest of the chapter complicates the morality tale. New Zealand is now building houses at a respectable rate, sixth of 21 countries on completions per person. Its dwellings are among the world's largest, and measured overcrowding is close to the lowest recorded. What failed was not the industry's capacity or the quality of the stock but the rationing of the land beneath: two decades in which demand and cheap credit met planning rules that released too little of it, in the market Chapter 8's household debt page priced. Affordability has yet to recover.

The ownership and tenure pages carry the social consequences. Home ownership, once the defining New Zealand institution, now sits in the bottom third of the comparable countries, below Britain, the United States and Australia, and post-communist Europe now owns its homes at rates New Zealand last saw generations ago. Social housing, at 3.8% of the stock, plays a small backstop role beside the Dutch, Austrian and Danish systems.

New Zealand by Numbers ended its housing chapter on a turn: prices falling, rents flat, ownership ticking up, planning law rewritten. This chapter shows how much ground that turn must recover. Fixing the flow of new housing was the easier half; the stock of past mistakes is priced into every mortgage in the country.

9.01 House prices



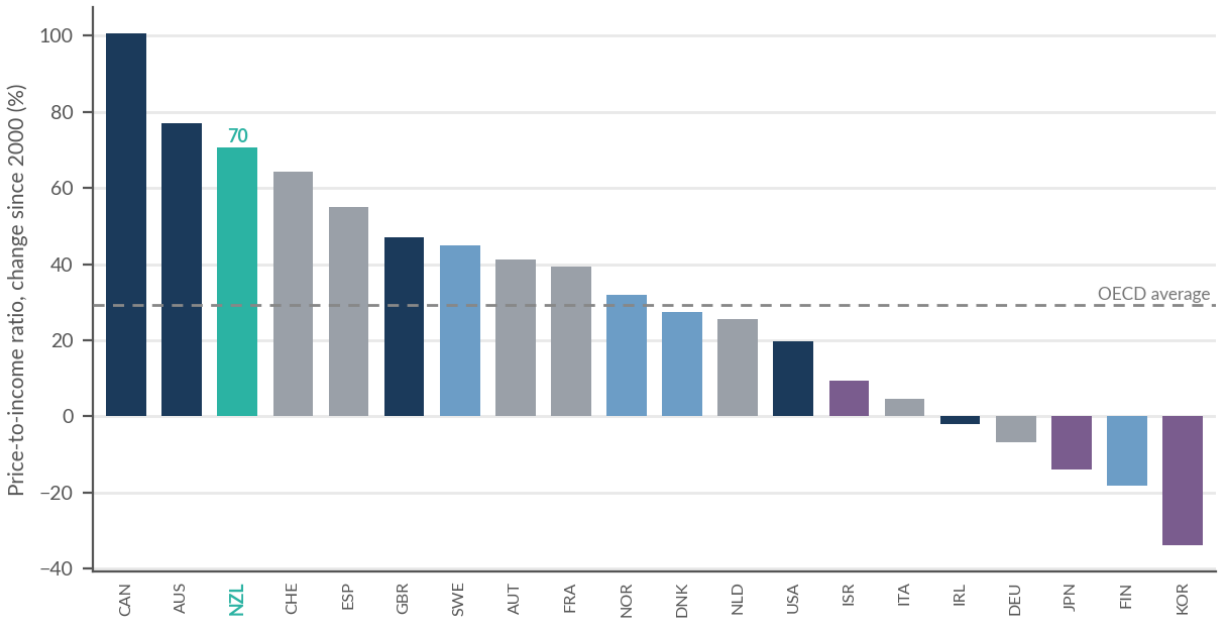
Source: OECD Analytical House Price Database

New Zealand tops this chart of twenty, by the margin the country's politics would predict: real house prices rose 192% between 2000 and 2025, ahead of Canada (180.2%) and Australia (162.5%), with the Nordic capitals, Sweden at 130.8% and Norway at 126.5%, well behind. The OECD-area figure over the same period was about 80%. At the bottom sit the countries where supply kept housing a consumer durable rather than letting it become an asset class: Germany (11.8%), Finland (6.8%), Italy (1.0%) and Japan, where real prices fell 6.7%.

The trebling of real prices was not a single boom but three stacked ones, as the domestic series in *New Zealand by Numbers* records: 2002 to 2008, 2012 to 2016 and the post-COVID surge to the 2021 peak, from which prices have since retreated by roughly a fifth. Even after that correction, the twenty-five-year line remains the steepest measured.

Japan and Germany suggest the counterfactual existed. Both are rich, urbanised and land-constrained, and both permitted enough building, Tokyo above all, to keep real prices flat for a generation. The difference was not geography or demand alone; whether the planning system allowed supply to answer price did much of the work, the same conclusion the Infrastructure Commission's work reaches for New Zealand and the theme of the pages that follow.

9.02 Affordability



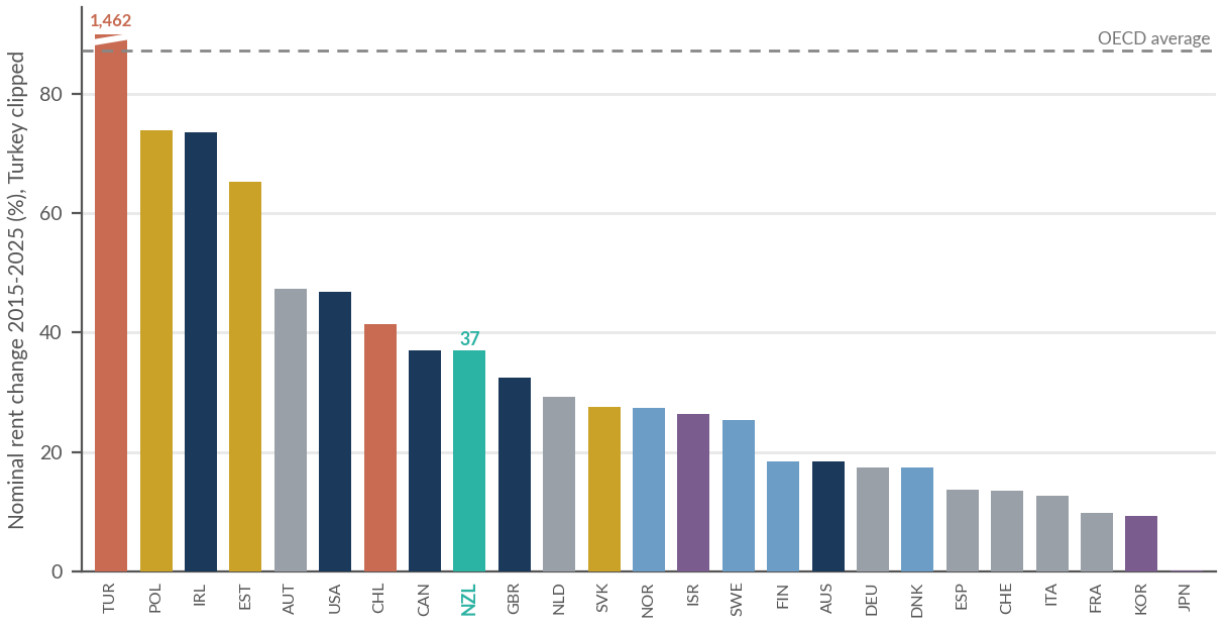
Source: OECD Analytical House Price Database

Divide house prices by household incomes and the same names lead: Canada's ratio deteriorated 100.7% since 2000, Australia's 76.9% and New Zealand's 70.5%, the third-worst of twenty countries and more than double the OECD average of 29.2%. At the other pole, price-to-income ratios actually improved in South Korea (-33.9%), Finland (-18.1%), Japan (-13.8%) and Germany (-6.8%).

The measure is a ratio of indices, so it shows deterioration against each country's own 2000 starting point rather than absolute levels. That matters for reading New Zealand fairly: its 2000 base was already unaffordable by the standards Demographia was then documenting, so a 70% deterioration compounds an elevated base. The correction since 2021, real prices down a fifth while nominal incomes grew, is visible in the gap between this page's 70.5% and the ratio's own 2021 peak.

The English-speaking sweep at the top of this chart, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with Britain (47.0%) not far behind, reflects a shared institutional inheritance: discretionary planning systems descended from Britain's 1947 Act, urban growth boundaries and the politics of incumbent homeowners. The countries that escaped, Japan by national zoning rules, Finland by municipal land supply, wrote different laws, not different economics.

9.03 Rents



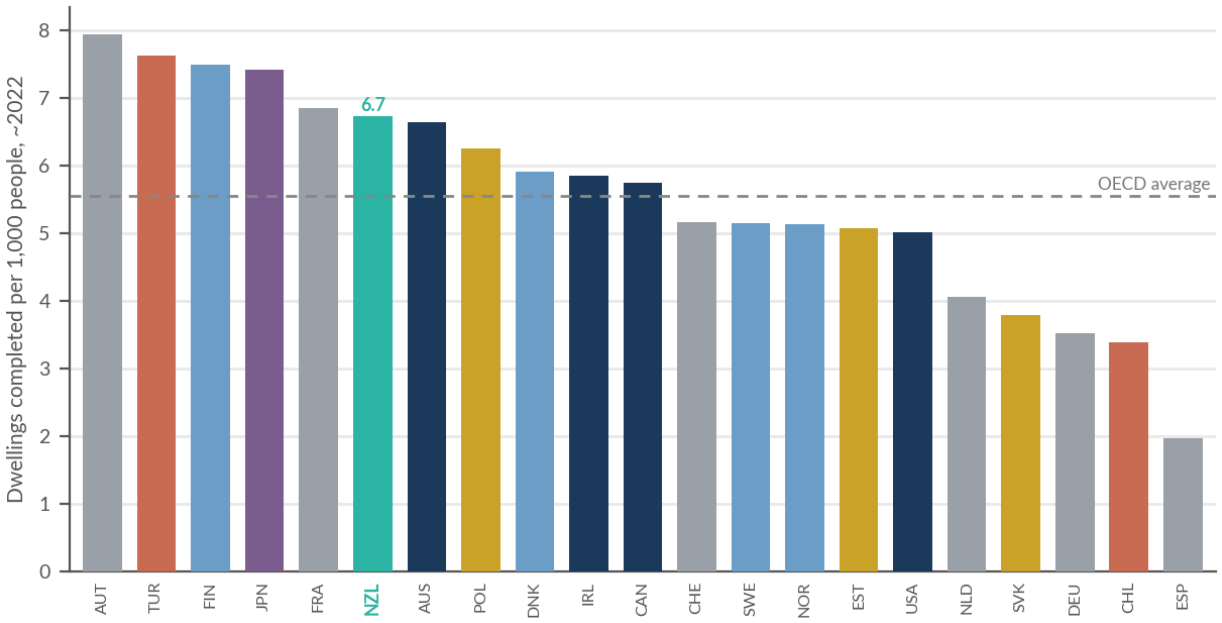
Source: OECD Analytical House Price Database

Rents rose 37.0% in nominal terms in New Zealand over the decade to 2025, ninth of 25 countries, in the same band as Canada (37.1%) and Britain (32.4%) and well clear of Australia (18.4%). Turkey's 1,462%, clipped in the chart, is general inflation rather than housing news; the meaningful top belongs to Poland (73.8%), Ireland (73.6%) and Estonia (65.3%), where migration surges met rigid rental supply. Japan, at 0.1% over ten years, remains the world's great rental flatline.

Deflate by each country's general inflation and New Zealand's decade splits in two: rents outran the CPI through the late 2010s, then stalled, with the national median flat for two years by 2026, as *New Zealand by Numbers* records. The recent flatness is the building boom of 9.04 arriving in tenants' budgets, as the supply-side case predicted.

Rents are the housing market's steadier gauge, immune to the credit conditions that whip prices around, which is why economists watch them more closely than the headline the newspapers prefer. On rents, New Zealand's record is middling rather than catastrophic, bad by Australian standards and enviable by Irish ones. The catastrophe was always in the price of the asset, not the price of the service, and that distinction locates the failure in land and finance rather than in landlords.

9.04 Building



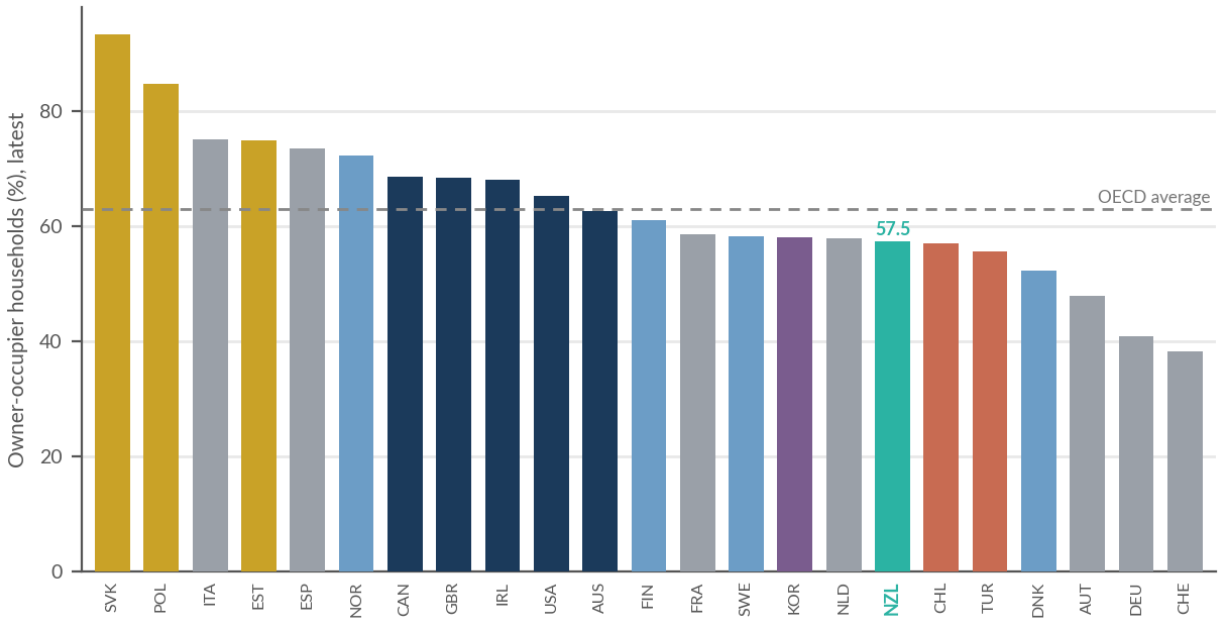
Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database (2018 series)

At its 2018 measurement point, New Zealand completed 6.7 dwellings per 1,000 people, sixth of 21 countries and above the OECD average of 5.6, and the domestic consent boom that followed pushed the rate higher still, to about ten consents per 1,000 by the 2022 record year recorded in *New Zealand by Numbers*. The chart's leaders are Austria (8.0), Turkey (7.6), Finland (7.5) and Japan (7.4); its laggards, Spain (2.0), Chile (3.4) and Germany (3.5).

Two names on the list deserve a pause. Japan builds more homes per person than almost any rich country despite a shrinking population, replacing its stock continuously, which is precisely why its prices at 9.01 went nowhere. Britain, absent here for data reasons, builds at roughly half New Zealand's per-capita rate on national figures, and its affordability crisis is correspondingly older and deeper.

New Zealand's respectable ranking rebuts the lazier version of the housing story: the country did not forget how to build, and when the Auckland Unitary Plan and cheap credit aligned, it built at rates unseen since the 1970s. The failure documented at 9.01 accumulated in the decades when building ran at half these rates against record migration. Flow has recovered; the shortfall is a stock, and stocks take a generation to work off.

9.05 Home ownership



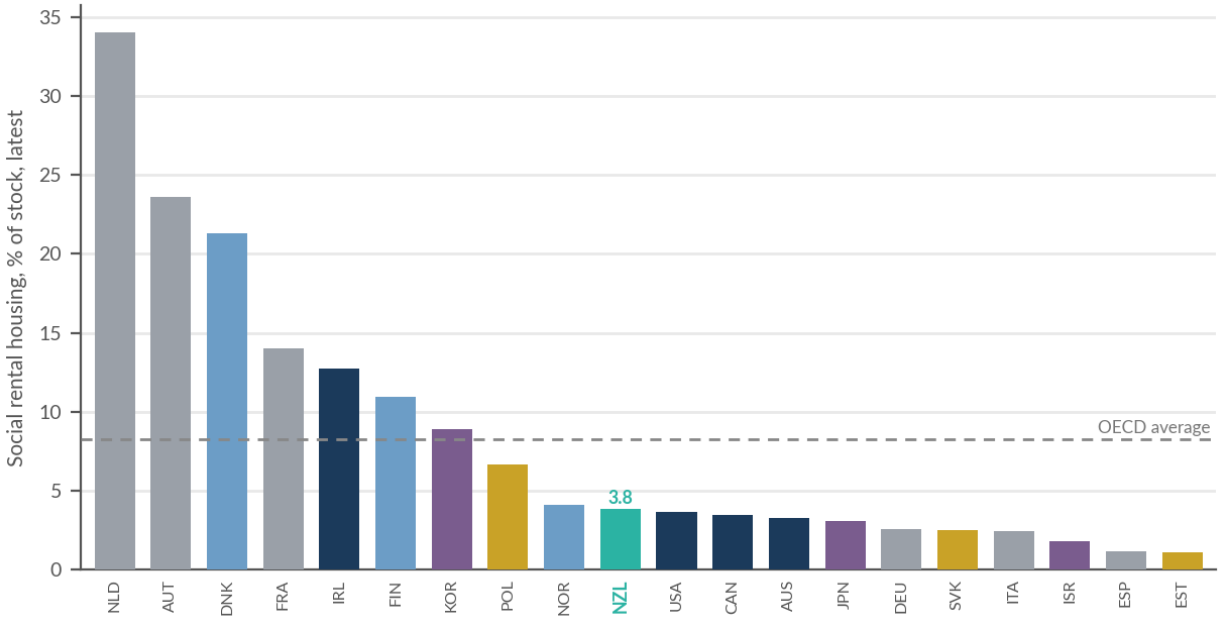
Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database (2018 series)

On the OECD's harmonised household surveys, 57.5% of New Zealand households own their home, 17th of 23 countries, below the United States (65.3%), Britain (68.4%) and Australia (62.7%), and far below the striking leaders: Slovakia at 93.5% and Poland at 84.7%, where post-communist privatisation handed tenants their flats. Renter societies anchor the other end, Switzerland at 38.2%, Germany at 41.0% and Austria at 47.9%, all rich, all stable, all majority-tenant.

A definitional caveat belongs in the record: New Zealand's census-based figure is 66.0%, as *New Zealand by Numbers* reports, because the census counts homes held in family trusts that the survey measure here treats differently. Even so, the cross-country ordering stands, and its direction is what stings: a country built on the quarter-acre dream now owns its homes at rates below most of the English-speaking world it once outranked.

The German and Swiss cases forbid one easy conclusion: low ownership is not itself a social failure where renting is secure, professional and lifelong. But New Zealand's rental market is nothing of the kind, dominated by small landlords and short tenancies. Falling ownership in a country institutionally arranged around ownership is the specific New Zealand problem, and its cause has already been charted twice this chapter.

9.06 Social housing



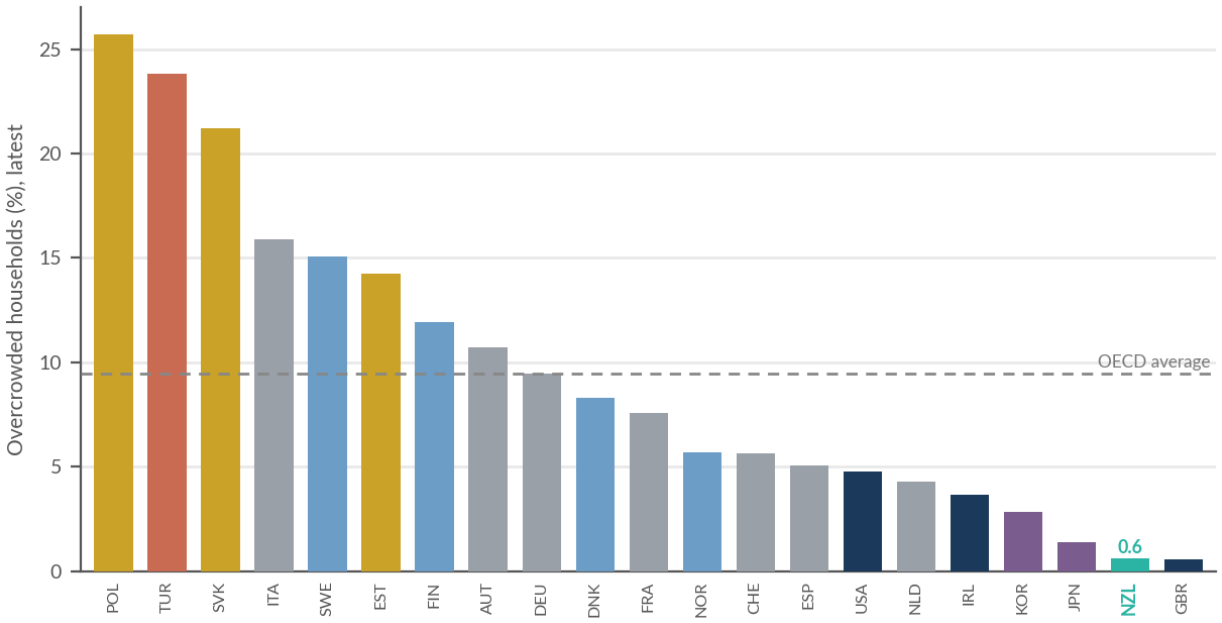
Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database (2018 series)

Social rental housing makes up 3.8% of New Zealand's dwelling stock, tenth of 20 countries and less than half the OECD average of 8.3%. The European social-rental states operate at a different order of magnitude: the Netherlands at 34.1% of the entire stock, Austria at 23.6%, Denmark at 21.3% and France at 14.0%. The Anglosphere clusters low together, the United States at 3.6%, Canada at 3.5% and Australia at 3.2%, with New Zealand marginally ahead of all three.

The ordering is a choice about where the state stands in the housing market. Vienna and Amsterdam made mass, mixed-income public housing the market's backbone; the English-speaking world made social housing a residual safety net for the neediest and left the middle to the market. Both models can work. The Anglo model fails specifically when the private market it relies on is throttled, which is the story this chapter has told: a 4% safety net cannot catch the casualties of a rationed 96%.

New Zealand's state housing share, as it happens, was once far higher relative to need, with the stock peaking around 70,000 dwellings in 1991 as *New Zealand by Numbers* notes, and the register of those waiting for it peaked above 26,000 households in 2022. No plausible building programme moves a country from 3.8% towards Vienna; whatever happens to the 4%, the price of the other 96% will decide the outcome.

9.07 Space

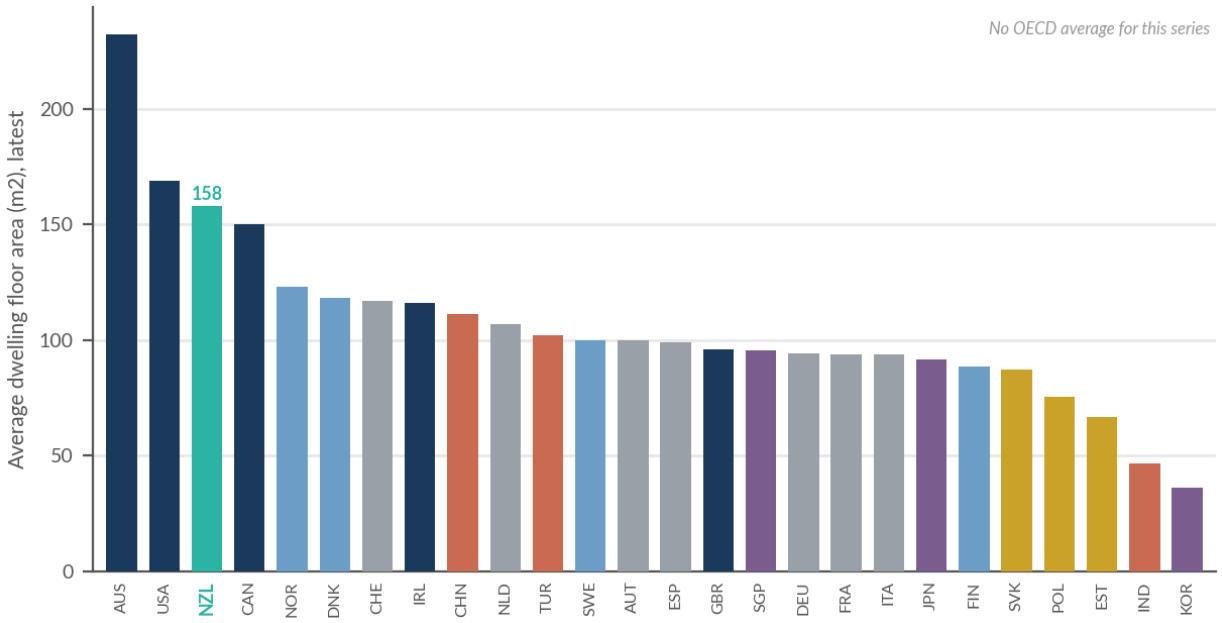


Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database (2018 series)

Measured by the EU-derived standard, just 0.6% of New Zealand households live in overcrowded conditions, the second-lowest rate of 21 countries, essentially level with Britain and far below the OECD average of 9.5%. Poland (25.7%), Turkey (23.8%) and Slovakia (21.2%) top the chart, and even wealthy Sweden (15.1%) and Finland (11.9%) record double-digit rates, an artefact of definitions that treat studio-dwelling singles as overcrowded.

The definitional generosity to New Zealand should be stated: the measure counts rooms against household composition, and countries of large suburban houses, as 9.08 confirms New Zealand to be, pass it almost automatically. Stats NZ's own crowding measure, built for New Zealand conditions, finds about one person in nine living in a crowded household, concentrated among Pacific and Māori families, and the severe housing deprivation counted in *New Zealand by Numbers* sits behind that again. The typical New Zealand household occupies more space than almost any society measured; the deprived tail occupies far less, and the averages conceal it. Housing scarcity in New Zealand never took the European form of small flats for everyone. It took the antipodean form: generous space for insiders, caravans and garages for the queue.

9.08 House sizes



Source: National statistical agencies; Eurostat

New Zealand's dwellings are among the largest on earth. At about 158 square metres on the new-build measure, New Zealand ranks third of 26 countries, behind Australia's 232 and the United States' 169, and comfortably ahead of Canada (150). The European stock averages 90 to 120 square metres, Japan's 92, and the chart's floor is South Korea's 36 square metres per dwelling on its per-capita-adjusted measure, with urban India at 47.

The definitions vary, stock averages for most of Europe, new builds for the Antipodes, and the mixture is flagged rather than hidden: comparability here is indicative, not exact. The Anglosphere settler countries nonetheless build houses twice the size of urban Europe's and three times urban Asia's, a preference as much as an outcome, purchased with abundant land and paid for in infrastructure that must stretch across it.

New Zealand's housing crisis, 9.01 and this page agree, was never about the houses, which are large, uncrowded and, on the building page, reasonably plentiful in flow. It was about what sits under them. Land, and the right to use it, is the scarce commodity every page of this chapter has priced, and the reform of the laws that ration it, now before Parliament as this book goes to print, is where the next edition's charts will be decided.

CHAPTER TEN

Energy and Environment

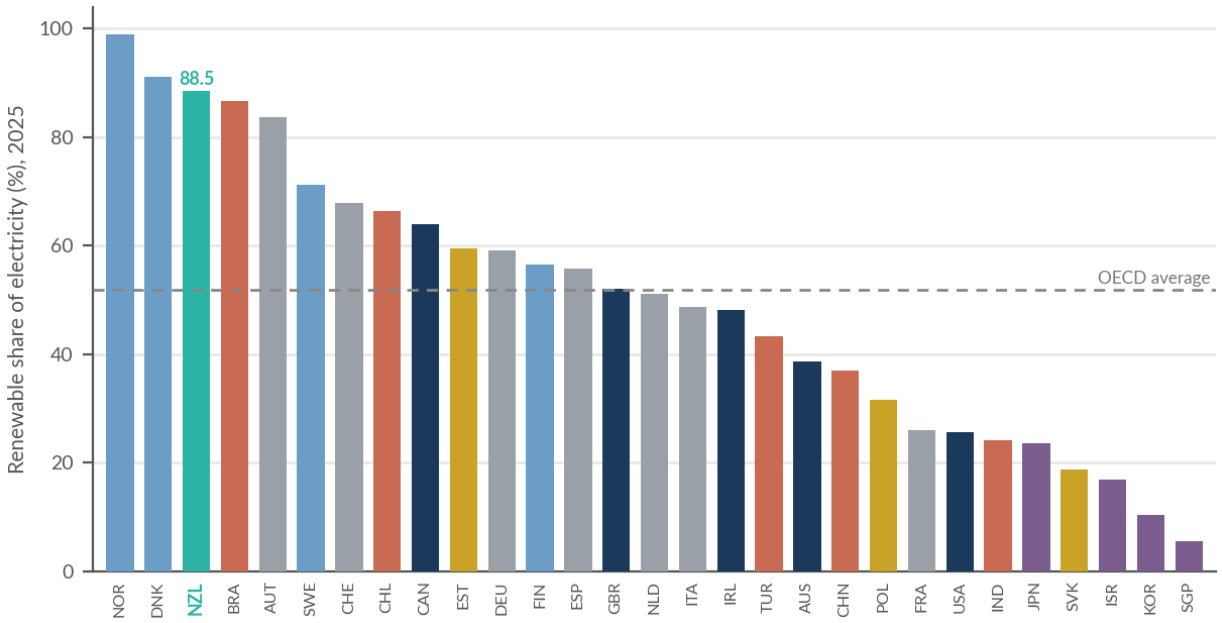
New Zealand enters the world's climate ledger twice, and the two entries disagree. Its electricity is 88.5% renewable, the third-highest share of the 29, behind only Norway's hydropower and Denmark's wind. Its total emissions per person are the fourth-highest, behind only Australia, Canada and the United States. Both facts are true, both matter, and the distance between them is the whole story of New Zealand's peculiar carbon arithmetic.

The reconciliation is pastoral. Roughly half of New Zealand's gross emissions are methane and nitrous oxide from livestock raised overwhelmingly for export, emissions the international accounting assigns to the producer rather than the eater. A country that generates clean power and exports protein to the world carries, on its own books, the carbon of everyone else's breakfast. The emissions-intensity page shows the same signature: heavy per unit of GDP by rich-world standards, for reasons that owe more to what New Zealand makes than to how well it makes it.

Where policy rather than agronomy drives the numbers, the story is mixed. Electric vehicle uptake sits at 12% of new sales, 21st of 29 and barely two-fifths of the OECD average, the visible residue of a subsidy granted, withdrawn and priced into behaviour, as *New Zealand by Numbers* records. Household electricity, at 21 US cents per kilowatt-hour, is mid-priced by rich-world standards despite the renewable endowment.

The chapter ends with some of the cleanest air this book measures: PM2.5 exposure below everywhere in Europe outside the Nordic-Baltic north. Remoteness, wind and a deindustrialised economy deserve most of the credit, which is itself the chapter's underlying theme. New Zealand's environmental standing is, in large measure, inherited. The question these charts pose is what the country adds to the inheritance.

10.01 Renewable electricity



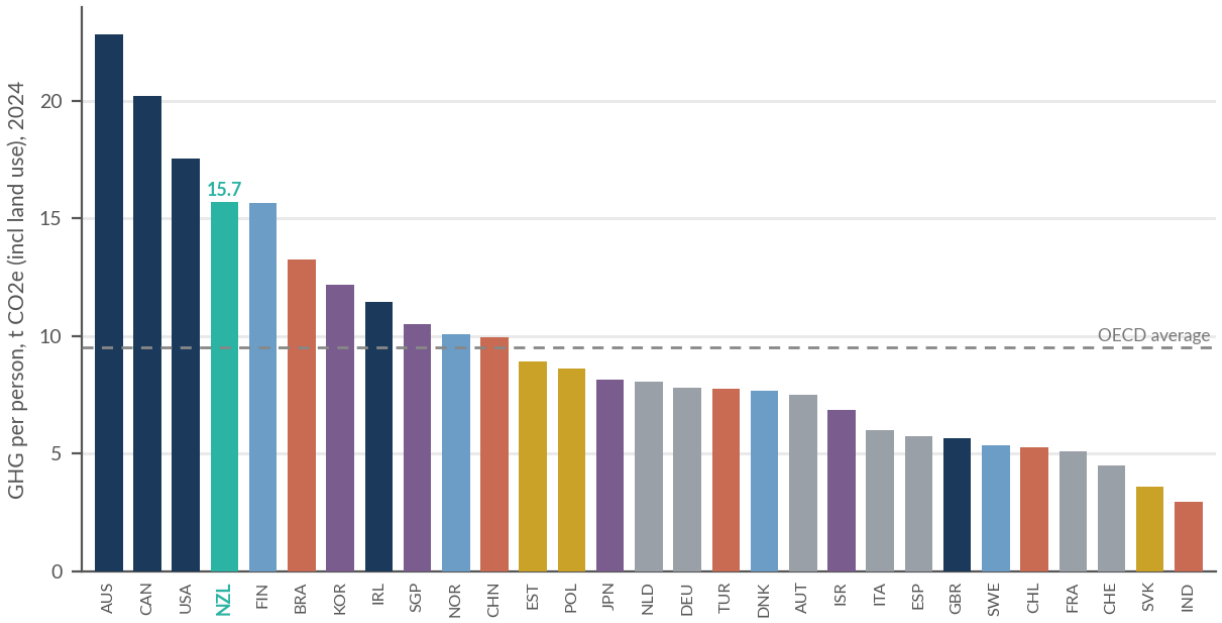
Source: Ember; Energy Institute via Our World in Data

New Zealand generated 88.5% of its electricity from renewable sources in 2025, third of 29 countries behind Norway (99.0%) and Denmark (91.2%), and far above the OECD average of 51.9%. The renewable laggards are the rich Asia-Pacific: Singapore at 5.5%, South Korea at 10.4%, Israel at 16.9% and Japan at 23.6%, with France's 26.1% explained by the nuclear fleet this measure excludes.

The composition separates inheritance from effort. Norway's hydro and New Zealand's were built generations ago; Denmark's 91% is manufactured, wind turbines erected inside three decades by deliberate policy. New Zealand's own gain, from 71.8% in 2000 to 88.5%, is real and recent, geothermal and wind stacked on the old hydro base, as *New Zealand by Numbers* details. But Britain's climb from 2.6% to 52.0% over the same window, and Australia's from 8.1% to 38.6%, dwarf it as feats of construction.

The endowment now sets the next problem. A grid already 88% renewable decarbonises further only at rising marginal cost, in dry-year backup and peak capacity, while the cheap abatement in New Zealand lies outside electricity altogether, in transport and industrial heat. Chasing the last percentage points of renewable generation for their own sake, the Interim Climate Change Committee found in 2019, would cost far more per tonne than abatement available elsewhere in the economy.

10.02 Gross emissions per person



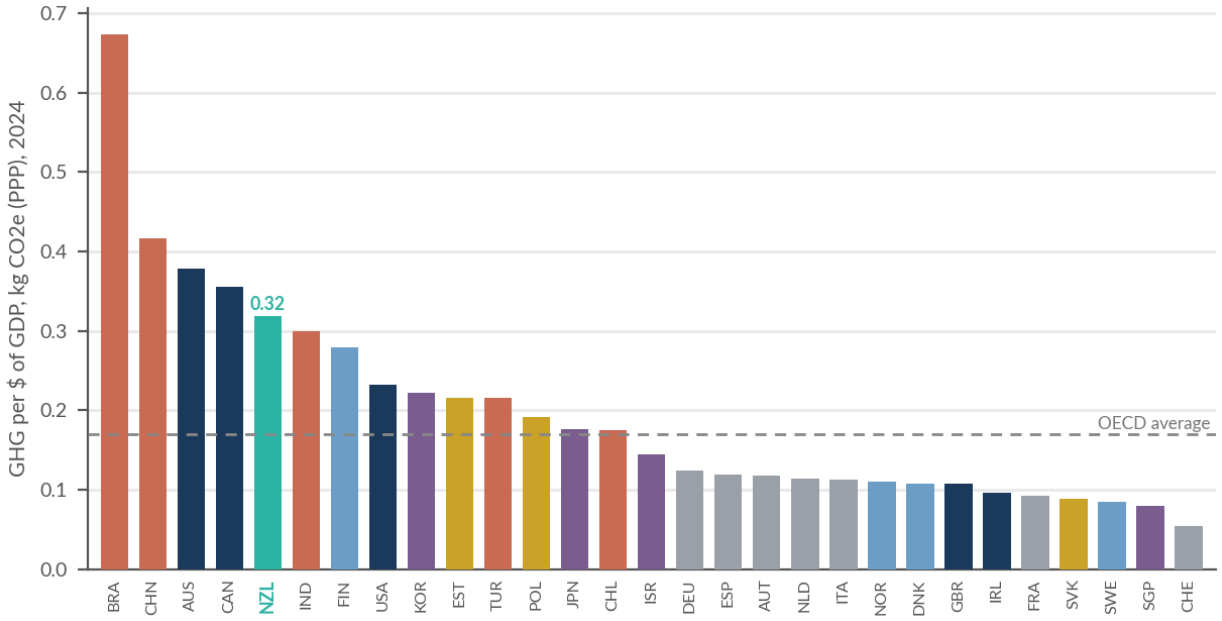
Source: Jones et al. via Our World in Data

Counting all greenhouse gases including land use, each New Zealander accounts for 15.7 tonnes of CO2-equivalent a year, the fourth-highest of 29 countries, behind Australia (22.8), Canada (20.2) and the United States (17.5), and two-thirds above the OECD average of 9.5. Europe sits far below: Britain at 5.6 tonnes, France at 5.1, Switzerland at 4.5. India's 2.9 tonnes closes the chart.

New Zealand's oddity is the composition. In the fossil-heavy leaders, coal, cars and industry drive the totals; in New Zealand, roughly half of gross emissions are biogenic methane and nitrous oxide from pastoral agriculture, as the inventory figures in *New Zealand by Numbers* set out. Production-based accounting books those emissions to New Zealand; the milk powder and beef are consumed abroad. A consumption-based chart would redraw this page in New Zealand's favour, though by how much is contested.

The level has been falling fast, with the Emissions Trading Scheme pricing a growing share of it: from 24.5 tonnes in 2000 to 15.7 now, a 36% drop per person while the population grew by more than a third, better progress than the United States, though Australia improved faster from a worse base. Decarbonisation without deindustrialisation is happening here as across the rich world. What no accounting choice changes is the destination: on any measure, a 15.7-tonne country has most of its journey ahead.

10.03 Emissions intensity



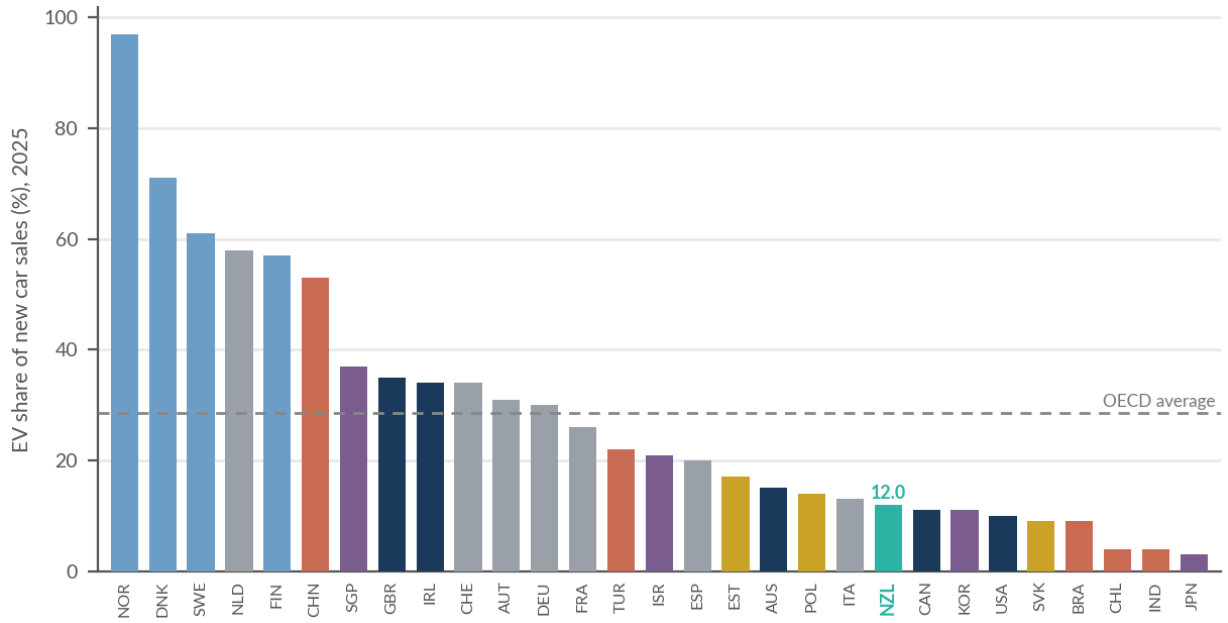
Source: Computed from Jones et al. and World Bank

Divide emissions by output and New Zealand emits 0.32 kilograms of CO2-equivalent for every purchasing-power dollar of GDP, fifth-highest of 29 countries, nearly twice the OECD average of 0.17 and behind only Brazil, China, Australia and Canada. Switzerland produces a dollar for 0.05 kilograms, one-sixth of New Zealand's carbon cost; Sweden, France and Ireland cluster near 0.09.

For a country with 88% clean electricity, the ranking looks perverse until the previous page's logic is applied: New Zealand's methane is booked at home while its products are eaten abroad, and the fuel it imports counts, rightly, against its own ledger. Emissions produced in New Zealand run well above the emissions embodied in what New Zealanders consume. The same signature marks every pastoral and extractive exporting economy on the chart, and the outlier below, Singapore at 0.08, shows the mirror image, a country that imports its food and exports finance.

The trend is the fair test of effort, and New Zealand passes it: intensity has halved since 2000, from 0.68, matching the rich world's pace of decoupling. The remaining gap to the frontier is, once again, structural, and it prices the strategic question New Zealand's climate policy circles endlessly: whether to shrink the herd, transform its emissions through science, or pay the world market price for what the accounting assigns. A single emissions price, this book's publisher has long argued, would let the market find the cheapest of the three; the Emissions Trading Scheme embodies that logic, though biological agricultural emissions still sit outside it.

10.04 Electric vehicles



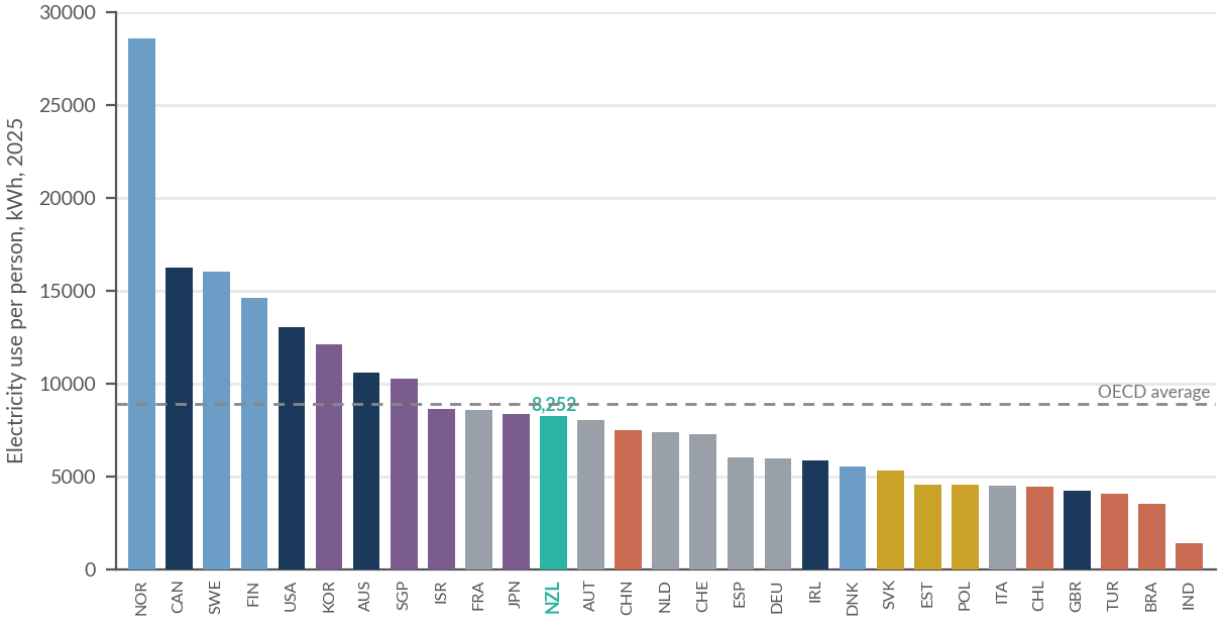
Source: International Energy Agency via Our World in Data

Electric vehicles, battery and plug-in hybrid together, took 12% of New Zealand's new car sales in 2025, 21st of 29 countries and well under half the OECD average of 28.6%. Norway has effectively finished the transition at 97%; Denmark (71%), Sweden (61%), the Netherlands (58%) and Finland (57%) follow, with China's 53% the volume story that is remaking the global industry. At the rear sit Japan (3%), the home of the hybrid's inventors, India and Chile (4%).

New Zealand's placement is the after-photo of a policy experiment that *New Zealand by Numbers* documents in full: the Clean Car Discount helped drive the EV share of new sales from 6.8% in 2019 to 27% in 2023, its abolition and new road-user charges dropped it to 11% within a year, and the market has crawled to 12% since. Norway's 97% was purchased the same way, with tax exemptions the state maintained, only recently trimmed, for two decades at extraordinary fiscal cost.

The chart therefore measures willingness to pay, both governments' and households', more than it measures anything technological, and because transport fuels sit inside the Emissions Trading Scheme, subsidised uptake shifts where abatement happens rather than adding to it while the cap binds. The economics beneath it are shifting regardless: Chinese manufacturing has pushed EV sticker prices towards parity, and New Zealand's clean grid means each electric kilometre is among the world's lowest-carbon, though charging at peak, when gas plants set the margin, narrows the advantage. The fleet might follow the used-import pipeline a decade behind the new-car chart.

10.05 Electricity generation



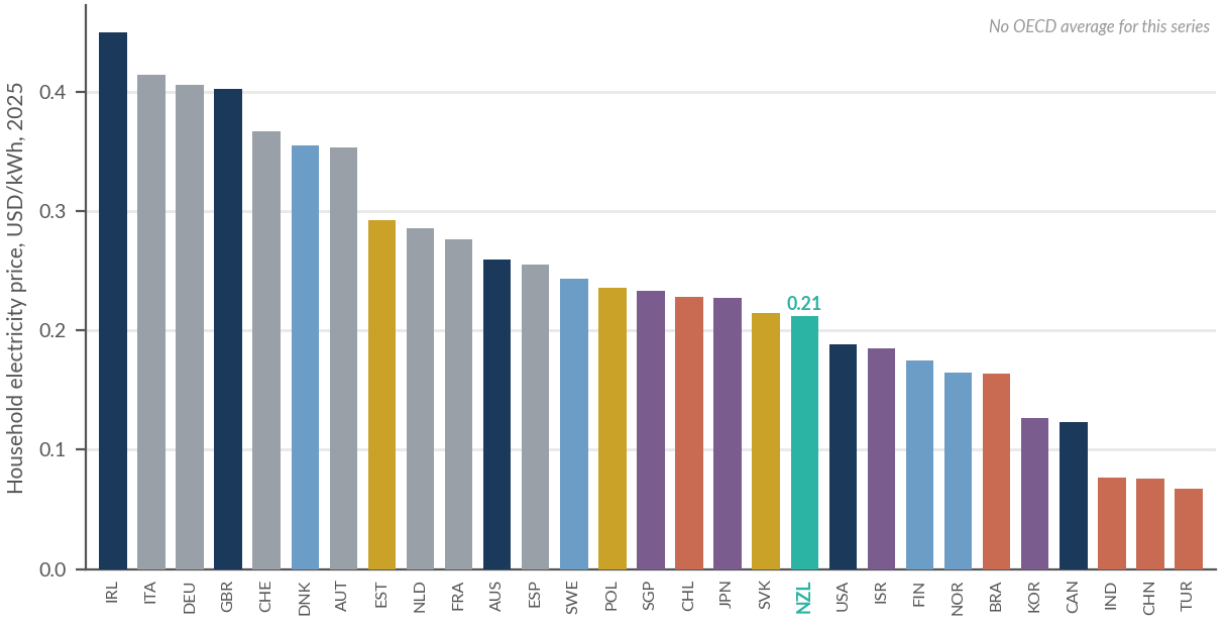
Source: Ember; Energy Institute via Our World in Data

New Zealand generates 8,252 kilowatt-hours of electricity per person a year, 12th of 29 countries and a shade below the OECD average of 8,900. Norway's 28,600 leads the world, hydropower feeding smelters and now data centres, with Canada (16,300), Sweden (16,000) and Finland (14,600) behind. Britain, at 4,200, generates barely half of what New Zealand does per head; India, at 1,400, closes the chart.

New Zealand's figure has fallen 18% since 2000, from about 10,100 kilowatt-hours per person, and the decline is efficiency rather than decay: output held broadly steady while the population grew by more than a third, the pattern *New Zealand by Numbers* records, with the Tiwai Point smelter's constant draw shrinking as a share of the whole. Britain and the United States show the same rich-world flatlining.

The next decades should lift most bars on this chart. Electrified transport, industrial heat and the data-centre boom all arrive as multiples of current demand, and the countries at the top, Norway and Canada above all, hold the raw material of the coming economy. New Zealand's renewable endowment and consented pipeline put it in better position than most; its record of actually building, as 8.15 noted, is the caveat.

10.06 Electricity prices



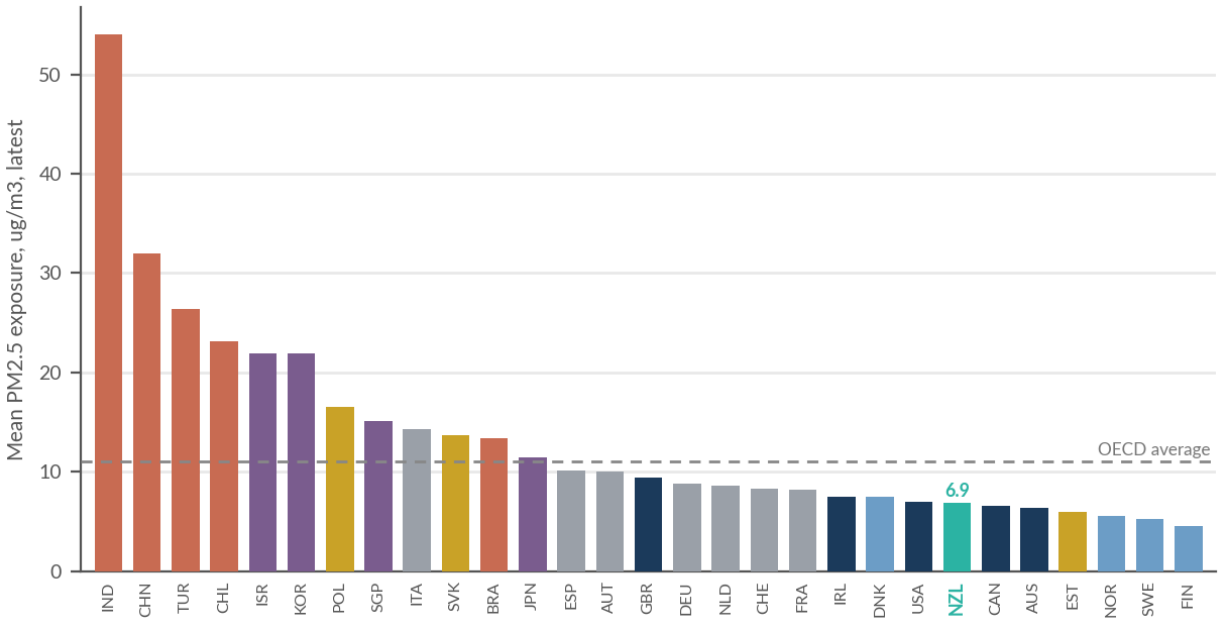
Source: GlobalPetrolPrices compilation

A kilowatt-hour costs a New Zealand household about 21 US cents, 19th of 29 countries, cheaper than every large European market and dearer than most of the non-European world. The expensive end is European policy made visible: Ireland at 45 cents, Italy and Germany at 41, Britain at 40, prices carrying network costs, levies and the wreckage of the gas crisis. The cheap end is subsidised or endowed: Turkey, China and India at 7 to 8 cents, Canada's hydro at 12, Norway at 17.

The comparison flatters and needles New Zealand at once. Cheaper than Europe is a low bar, and Australia, at 26 cents, shows a fossil-heavy neighbour paying a quarter more. But a country with one of this book's most renewable, mostly depreciated generation fleets might hope for Canadian or Norwegian prices, and does not get them: wholesale prices are set at the margin, and the margin in a dry year burns gas. Transmission costs across mountainous low-density geography and, critics argue, the structure of the generator-retailer market take their share too, and the 12.2% jump that *New Zealand by Numbers* records for 2025 shows the direction.

Energy is an input price to everything else in the economy, which is why this page belongs beside the productivity chapter as much as the environmental one. Cheap clean power is among the few genuinely decisive advantages available to a remote country in an electrifying world. New Zealand holds the endowment; the margin, so far, sets the price.

10.07 Air quality



Source: World Bank; OECD

The average New Zealander breathes air carrying 6.9 micrograms of fine particulate matter per cubic metre, the seventh-cleanest of 29 countries and far below the OECD average of 11.0. Only Finland (4.6), Sweden (5.3), Norway (5.5), Estonia (5.9), Australia (6.4) and Canada (6.6) rank better. At the other end, India's 54.1 micrograms is nearly eight times New Zealand's exposure, with China (32.0) and Turkey (26.4) following.

The clean club's membership list gives the game away: sparse, windy, maritime countries with little heavy industry. New Zealand's advantage is largely gifted by the roaring forties, and the WHO's tightened guideline of 5 micrograms shows even this book's cleanest air is not yet clean by health standards. New Zealand's remaining problem, winter wood smoke in still southern towns, is exactly the local, seasonal residue that *New Zealand by Numbers* describes.

The broader good news of the rich world is in the trend: Britain's exposure halved since 2000, America's fell 52%, and nearly every developed country on the chart improved, Australia alone drifting slightly the other way. Air pollution remains the world's largest environmental killer, but its incidence falls most heavily on poorer countries, and the gradient on this chart, top to bottom, shows the divide sharply.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Government and Institutions

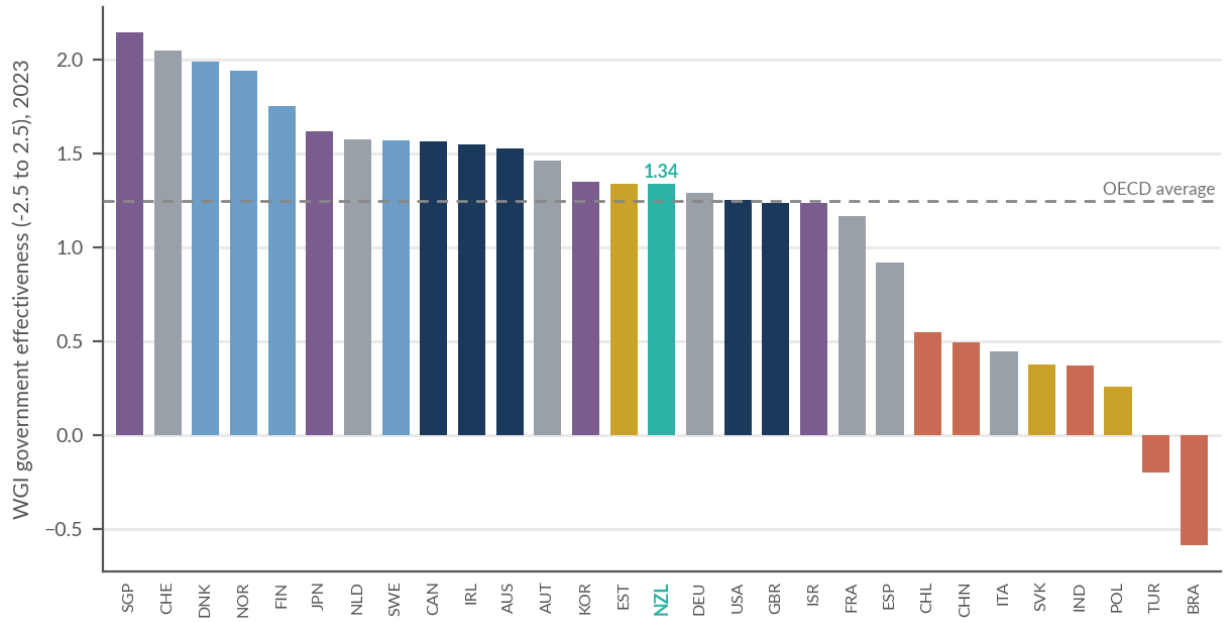
Institutions are New Zealand's oldest export credential. For decades the country has traded on incorruptible officials, secure property rights and a state that does what it says, and this chapter confirms the brand retains most of its value: fourth of these countries for honesty, fifth for the rule of law, second for economic freedom. For a nation that cannot compete on scale, location or capital, clean institutions are the comparative advantage that costs nothing to run and everything to lose.

The chapter's fine print reads less comfortably. On the World Bank's government effectiveness measure, the machinery of the state as distinct from its honesty, New Zealand has slipped from the top tier to fifteenth, mid-table, level with Estonia and just ahead of Germany. Its corruption score, still elite, has shed ten points in a decade. The pattern across the Anglosphere is the same and worse, which is cold comfort: the institutions New Zealand inherited are depreciating across the whole family that built them.

Two pages at the chapter's end measure something New Zealand rarely compares: where decisions are made. Scarcely any country in this book is more centralised: subnational government commands 10.3% of public spending, 26th of 28 countries, ahead of only Ireland and Turkey, against an OECD average of 33%, and each New Zealand council serves, on average, 76,000 people, among the largest catchments measured. Denmark, as centralised a welfare state as exists in the imagination, runs two-thirds of its spending locally.

The pairing matters because this chapter's honesty rankings and its effectiveness rankings diverge. New Zealand's government is among the world's cleanest; whether it is among the most capable, and whether a capital city of a five-million-person country should decide as much as Wellington does, are different questions, and this chapter scores them separately.

11.01 Government effectiveness



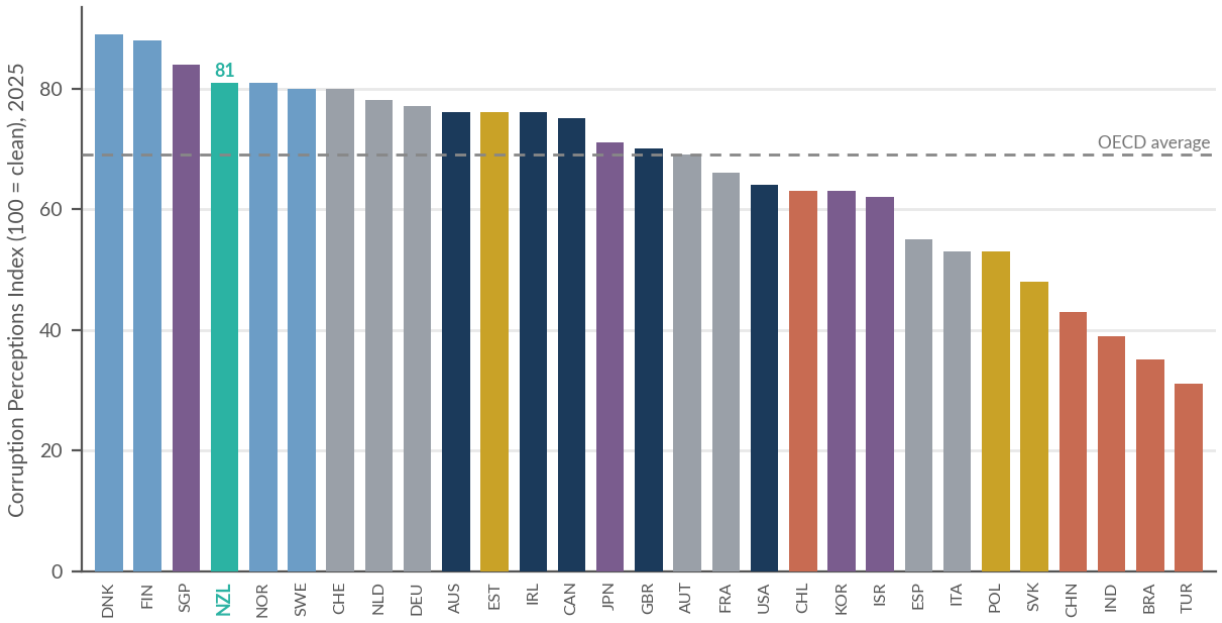
Source: World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators

The World Bank's government effectiveness index aggregates perceptions of public service quality, policy consistency and implementation. New Zealand scores 1.34 on the -2.5 to 2.5 scale, 15th of 29 countries, above the OECD average of 1.25 but distinctly mid-pack. Singapore (2.15), Switzerland (2.05), Denmark (1.99) and Norway (1.94) define the frontier of state capability; Brazil (-0.59) and Turkey (-0.20) anchor the floor.

New Zealand scored 1.59 in 2000 and has drifted down a quarter of a point since; Britain fell from 1.77 to 1.24, the United States from 1.73 to 1.26 and Australia from 1.73 to 1.53. Every English-speaking country in this book has become, on this measure, meaningfully less effective at governing over the century's first quarter, while Estonia rose to parity with them all and East Asia held firm.

Perception indices deserve their caveats: they lag events and reward stability. But the Anglosphere's decline is too uniform and too sustained to dismiss, and it matches the lived evidence of stalled projects, policy churn and delivery failure from London to Wellington. Clean government, the next page shows, New Zealand has kept. Capable government is the harder asset, and this chart says it has been quietly wasting.

11.02 Corruption Perceptions



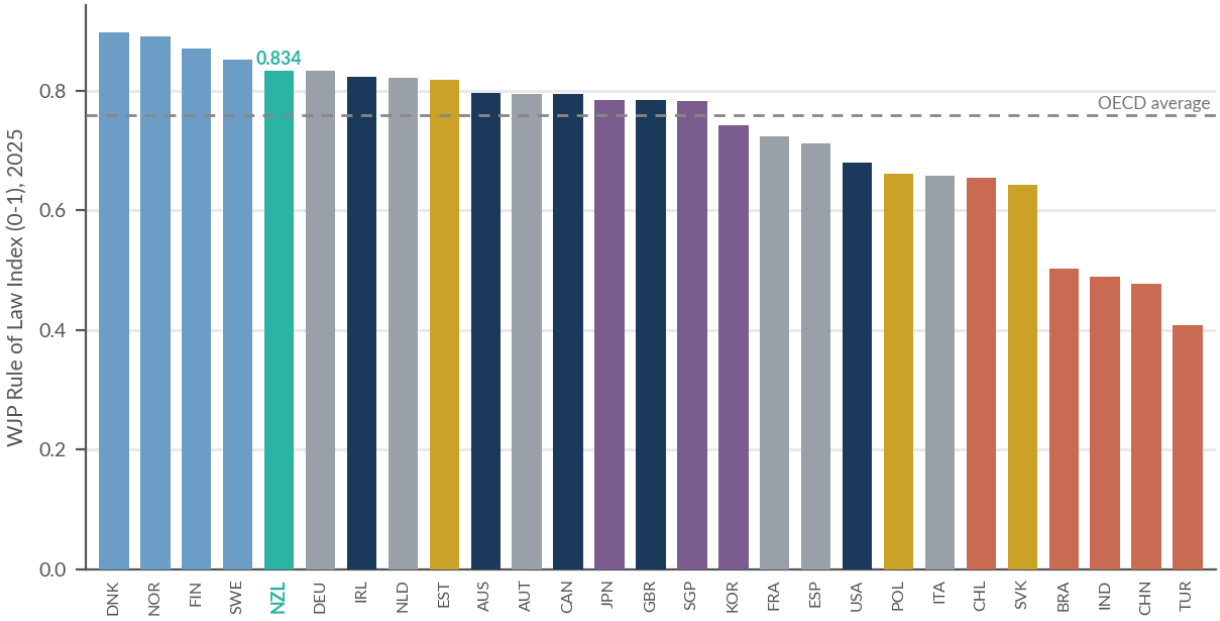
Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index

New Zealand scores 81 on Transparency International's 100-point scale, fourth of 29 countries and level with Norway, behind Denmark (89), Finland (88) and Singapore (84). The rich democracies fill the top third, the great emerging economies the bottom: China at 43, India at 39, Brazil at 35 and Turkey at 31. The United States, at 64, sits below Estonia and Germany, and barely above Chile, on the honesty of its public sector as the world's experts perceive it.

For most of the index's history New Zealand ranked first or second in the world, a distinction so routine it became part of the national furniture. The 2025 edition marks the change: 91 points in 2014, 81 now, still elite, no longer supreme. The slippage is shared, Britain fell from 78 to 70 and America from 74 to 64 over the same decade, but Denmark barely slipped, which spoils the excuse.

The practical stakes are larger than national pride. A top-five integrity ranking is priced into New Zealand's borrowing costs, its trade credibility and every contract its firms sign abroad; it is the institutional collateral of a small country. The index's own methodology cautions that a few points' movement can be noise. Ten points in a decade, in one direction, is not noise. It is a trend that has started and can therefore be stopped.

11.03 Rule of law



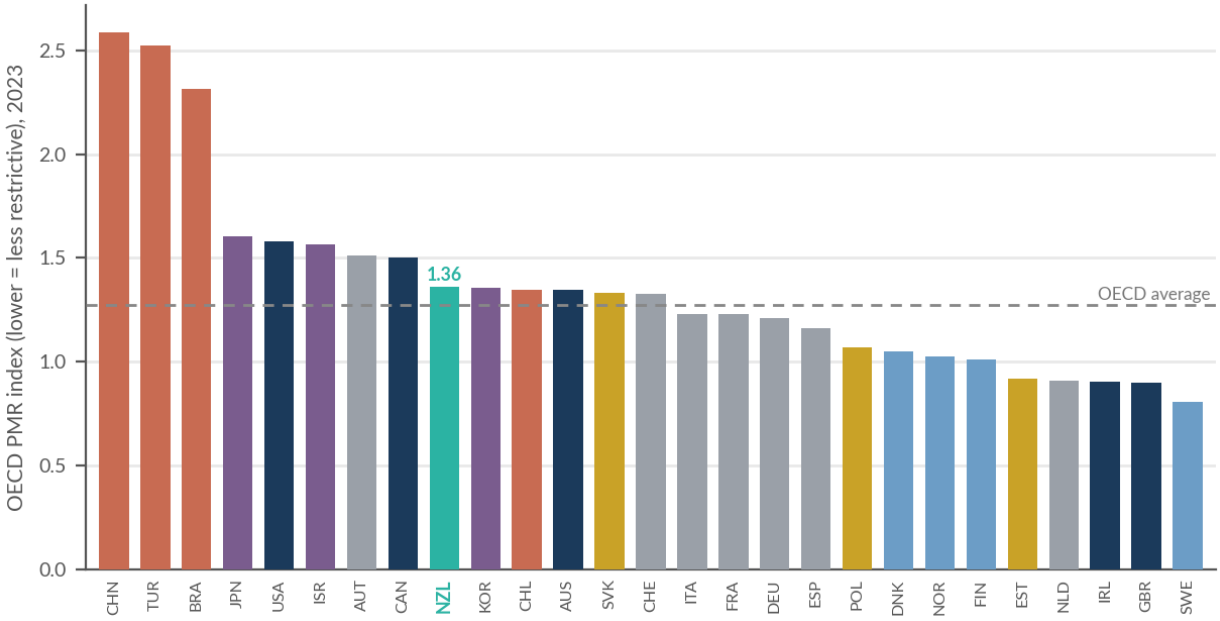
Source: World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index

The World Justice Project measures the law as it is lived: constraints on government, absence of corruption, open justice, order and security. New Zealand scores 0.83, fifth of the 27 countries covered, behind Denmark (0.90), Norway (0.89), Finland (0.87) and Sweden (0.85), and first outside the Nordic bloc. Turkey (0.41), China (0.48) and India (0.49) close the chart; the United States, at 0.68, ranks nineteenth, below Spain and France.

New Zealand's decade-long line is the flattest in the book's institutional chapter: 0.84 in 2015, 0.83 in 2025. While America shed six points and Britain two, the New Zealand legal order simply held, through a pandemic that tested emergency powers everywhere. Among the Anglosphere's gifts to itself, the independent court and the constrained executive have proved the most durable, and New Zealand's version the most durable of all, though the reach of its senior courts has itself become a live constitutional debate.

The rankings' composition rewards attention: Singapore, first for government effectiveness at 11.01, ranks fifteenth here, its administrative brilliance built on thinner constraints on state power. The Nordic-plus-New Zealand cluster at this chart's top combines both, capable states that are also caged ones. That combination, rarer than either trait alone, is the actual institutional prize, and New Zealand, for now, still holds it.

11.04 Regulation



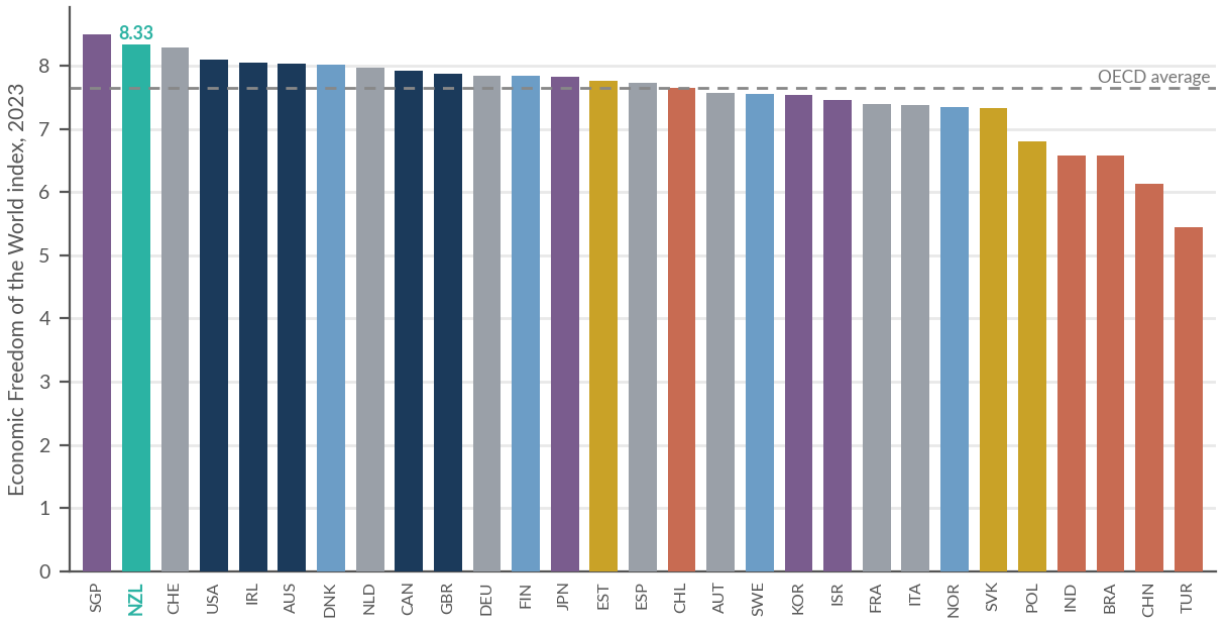
Source: OECD Product Market Regulation Indicators

The OECD's product market regulation index scores how much rules impede competition, from state ownership to licensing to trade barriers; lower is freer. New Zealand scores 1.36 against an OECD average of 1.27, ninth-most-restrictive of 27 countries measured, in a band with Canada (1.50), South Korea, Chile and Australia (all 1.35). The lightest regulatory states are Sweden (0.81), Britain and Ireland (0.90); the heaviest by far are China (2.59), Turkey (2.52) and Brazil (2.32).

The placement will surprise readers who know New Zealand's reputation, and the previous page's, as a free-market exemplar. The 2023 PMR round found New Zealand's state still owning many assets, its foreign investment screening among the OECD's most restrictive, and its licensing and consenting apparatus heavier than the English-speaking norm, findings consistent with the OECD's economic surveys and with this book's own infrastructure and FDI pages.

The index measures rules on paper, not what happens in practice, and reasonable people contest its significance. But its correlation with productivity growth is among the more robust in the policy literature, which is why the OECD's economic surveys of New Zealand have returned to it repeatedly since the 2010s. The country that reduced economic regulation most dramatically in the 1980s now regulates its product markets more than Sweden, more than Denmark and more than Britain. The revolution, as 11.05 confirms, has been resting on its laurels.

11.05 Economic freedom



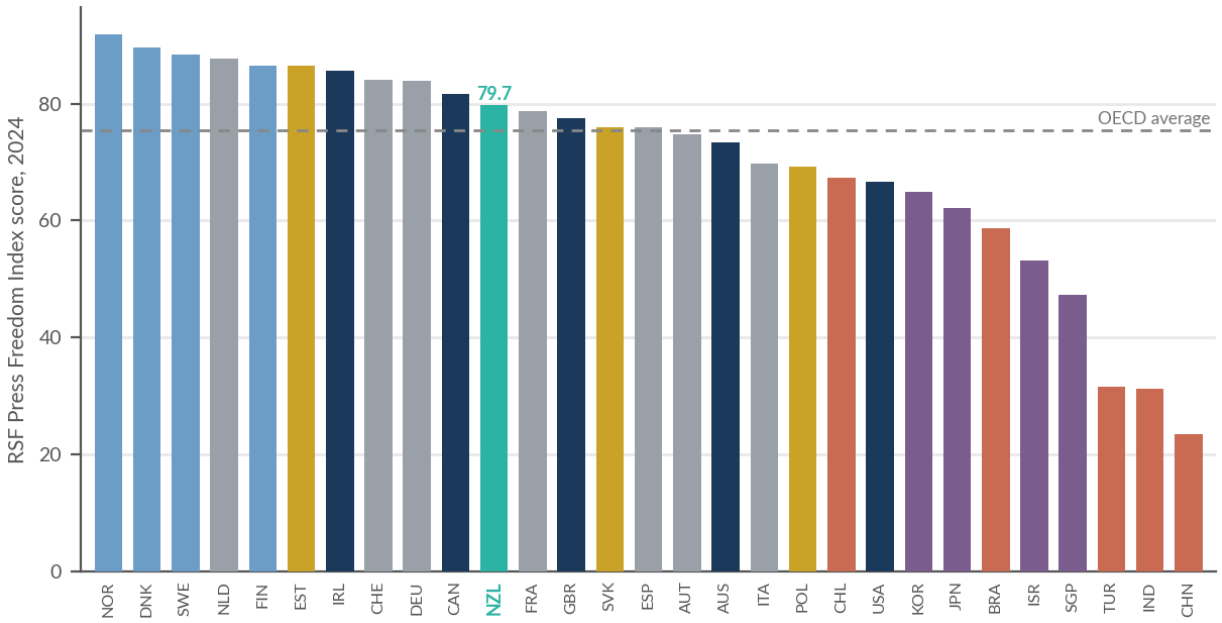
Source: Fraser Institute, Economic Freedom of the World

The Fraser Institute's index aggregates the size of government, property rights, sound money, trade openness and regulation into the broadest measure of economic liberty available. New Zealand scores 8.33 of 10, second of these 29 countries and behind only Singapore (8.50), with Switzerland (8.28), the United States (8.10) and Ireland (8.05) completing the top five. Turkey (5.44), China (6.13) and Brazil (6.57) hold the floor.

Second among these countries, and third in the world once unlisted Hong Kong is counted, is a formidable ranking, and its durability across three decades of index editions reflects the depth of the 1980s reordering: secure property, open trade, sound money and a clean tax base, none seriously revisited since. But here too the change column whispers what the PMR page said aloud: New Zealand scored 8.76 in 2000, and the 0.43-point erosion since is among the larger declines at the index's top, where movements are usually measured in hundredths.

The two pages reconcile without contradiction. Fraser's broad canvas still shows the 1984-93 settlement standing; the OECD's regulatory microscope shows the accumulating clutter upon it. Their joint message is the theme of this book's economic half: New Zealand's institutional capital remains world-class and has been quietly drawn down for a quarter of a century, in freedom as in effectiveness as in honesty. Endowments erode politely, then suddenly.

11.06 Press freedom



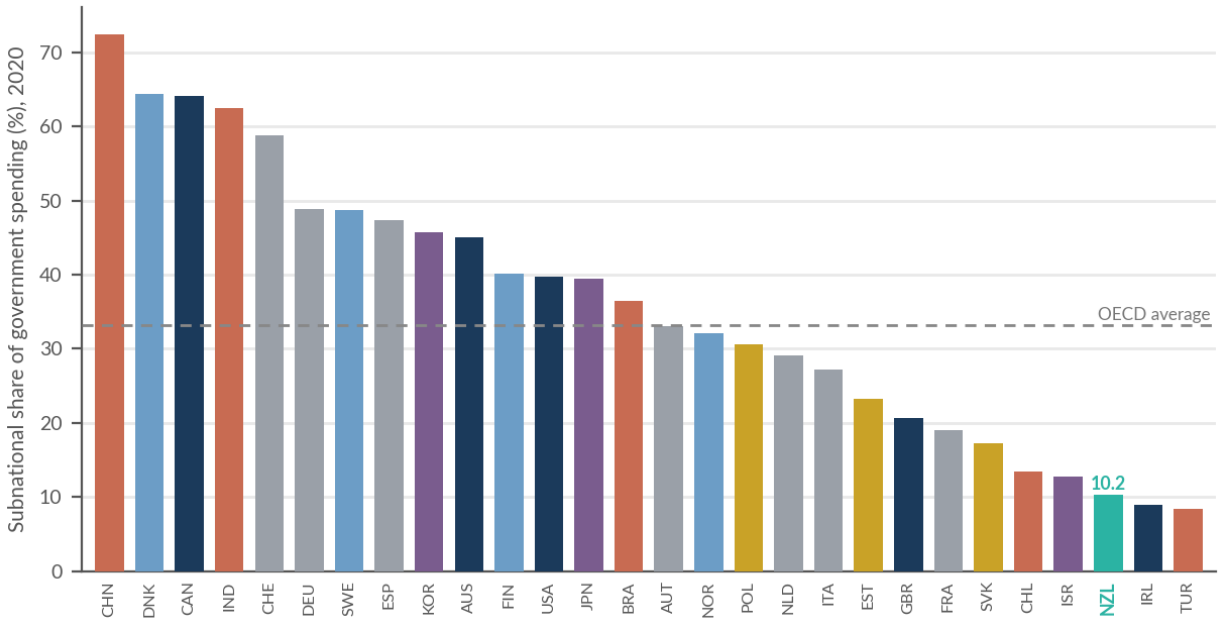
Source: Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index

Reporters Without Borders scores the environment for journalism, legal, political, economic and physical. New Zealand's 79.7 ranks 11th of 29 countries, in the second tier below a Nordic-Baltic summit of Norway (91.9), Denmark (89.6), Sweden (88.3) and the Netherlands (87.7), and just behind Canada (81.7). Below, the gradient runs through the compromised democracies, Israel at 53.2, to Singapore's 47.2 and the chart's floor: Turkey, India and China, where journalism is practised against the state's active resistance.

New Zealand's second-tier placement reflects economics more than politics. The index's recent editions mark every English-speaking country down for media-market fragility, collapsing revenue, ownership concentration and newsroom shrinkage, the same forces *New Zealand by Numbers* traced through the death of the audited circulation figures. The legal and physical environment for New Zealand journalists remains among the world's safest.

A free press is the auditing profession of every other page in this chapter: corruption stays low where someone is paid to look. That is what makes the economic fragility of journalism, in New Zealand as across the West, an institutional loss as well as an industry's hard luck story. The legal protections are sound; the business model is the worry.

11.07 Fiscal decentralisation



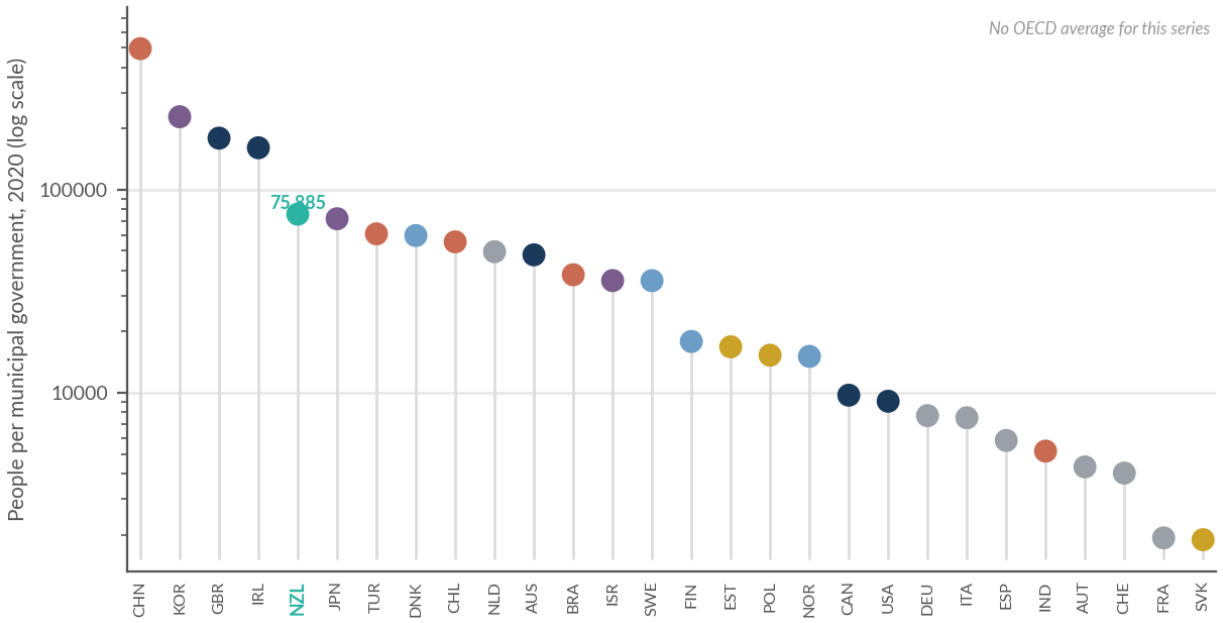
Source: OECD/UCLG World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance

New Zealand's constitutional debates never cite this chart. Subnational government, councils, in New Zealand's case, spends 10.3% of total government expenditure, 26th of 28 countries, ahead of only Ireland (8.9%) and Turkey (8.4%), and less than a third of the OECD average of 33.1%. The decentralised world starts at double New Zealand's share: Denmark devolves 64.4% of public spending, Canada 64.1%, Switzerland 58.8%, Germany 48.9%. Even centralist France runs 19%.

Federal constitutions explain the top, but Denmark, Sweden (48.7%) and Finland (40.1%) are unitary states like New Zealand, their municipalities running schools, care and health services that Wellington runs from the centre. New Zealand's councils do pipes, roads, parks and consents; nearly everything a citizen touches, health, education, welfare, police, housing, answers to the capital. Among developed unitary states, only Ireland concentrates more.

Whether centralisation is vice or virtue is a live argument: it buys uniformity and scale, and it forfeits local knowledge, competition between jurisdictions and the fiscal incentive for communities to welcome growth, a mechanism this book's publisher has long argued explains why New Zealand towns fight housing that Swiss communes court. What the chart settles is only the fact, and the fact is stark: by the standards of the developed world, New Zealand barely practises local government at all.

11.08 Local government scale



Source: OECD/UCLG World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance

The companion fact: what little local government New Zealand has, it runs at great scale. The average New Zealand municipal authority serves about 75,900 people, the fifth-largest catchment of 28 countries, behind China's mega-districts, South Korea (229,000), Britain (180,000) and Ireland (161,000). The European norm is a different institution altogether, and the comparison needs its caveat: France and Austria also run departments and regions above their communes to carry the scale tasks, where a New Zealand council is the whole subnational structure. Still, the contrast in proximity stands: the average French commune serves 1,900 people, the average Swiss commune 4,000, the average Austrian one 4,300, and the spread is so wide that the chart uses a logarithmic scale.

Together with the previous page, this chart describes the New Zealand model: few functions, exercised by few, large councils. Britain and Ireland share the pattern, the Anglosphere's unitary members having consolidated their way to scale through the twentieth century, New Zealand decisively in the 1989 amalgamations. The opposite corner, Switzerland's 2,100 communes with real taxing power, is not administrative quaintness; it is the machinery of the interjurisdictional competition that keeps Swiss government the second-most effective on 11.01.

Scale has genuine returns in water engineering and back-office systems, the argument that drove every amalgamation from Auckland's on. What it cannot do is represent: a council of 76,000 average citizens is a small government, not a community's instrument, and the localism debate now stirring in New Zealand is, on this chart's evidence, a debate about moving towards the developed world's usual practice rather than away from it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Wellbeing and Society

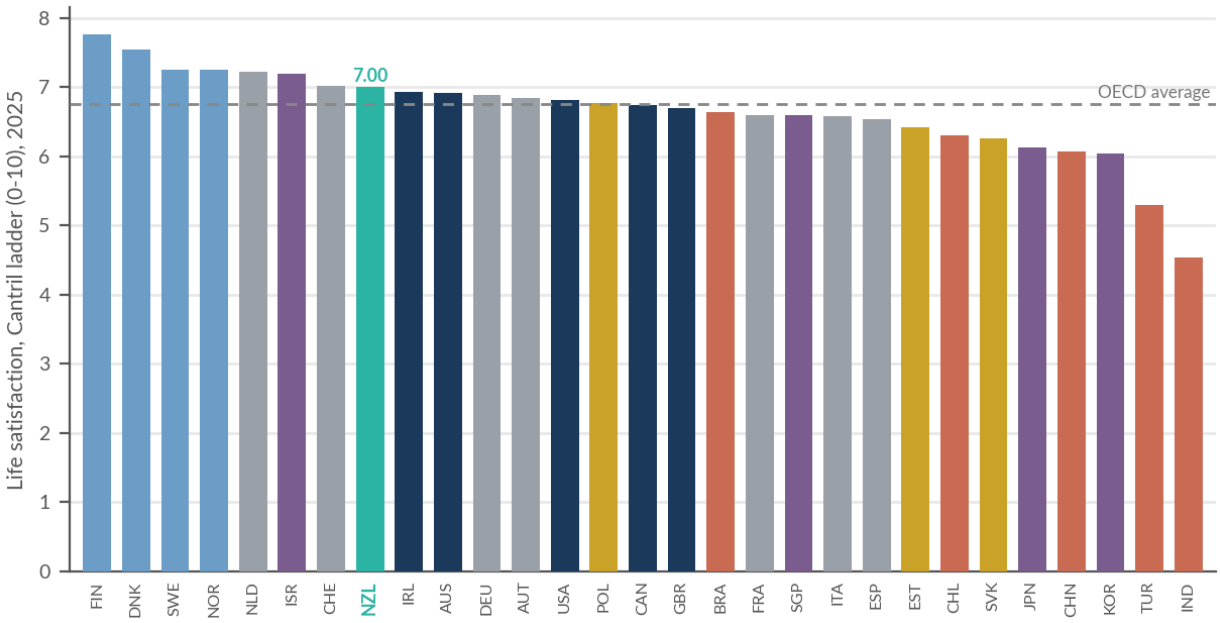
After eleven chapters of prices, rates and rankings, this final chapter asks the only question the others serve: how are the people? The answers survey respondents give deserve the modesty *New Zealand by Numbers* urged, since feelings resist translation across languages and cultures. They also deserve attention, because on these charts New Zealand does something it manages almost nowhere else in this book: it performs above its income.

New Zealanders rate their lives at 7.0 on the ten-point ladder, eighth of 29, behind only the Nordic quartet, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Israel, and ahead of richer America, Germany and Britain. They rank sixth for having someone to count on, fifth for generosity, eighth for trusting their neighbours and seventh for trusting their government. The productivity laggard of Chapter 7 is, by the evidence of its own citizens, one of the developed world's more successful societies.

The gap between those two facts can be read two ways, and the choice matters. The comfortable reading is compensation: New Zealand trades income for liveability and the trade is worth it. The uncomfortable reading is inheritance: social capital, like the hydro dams of Chapter 10 and the institutions of Chapter 11, is an endowment being spent, and the satisfaction data have in fact drifted down since 2012 here as across the Anglosphere, with the young driving the decline in most places where it is measured.

East Asia's presence at this chapter's bottom, South Korea 27th for life satisfaction and last for social support despite five decades of economic miracle, is the cautionary panel of the whole book. Growth without connection buys remarkably little contentment. New Zealand holds the connection and has misplaced the growth; the countries above it on this chart, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands, are the proof that no such choice is compulsory.

12.01 Life satisfaction



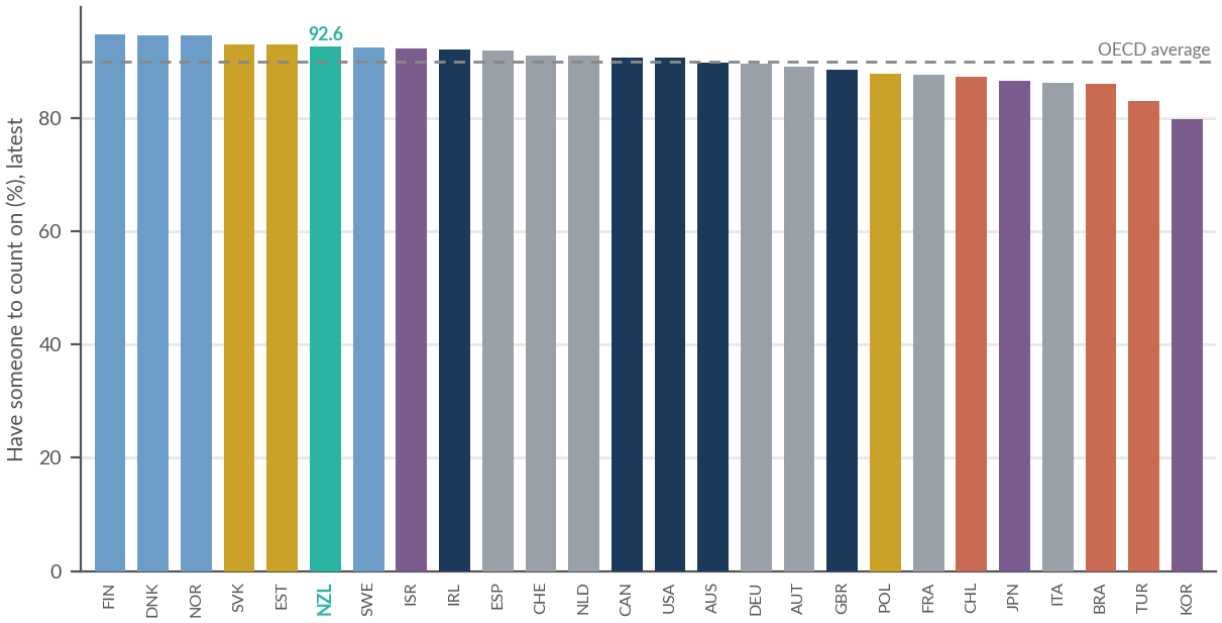
Source: World Happiness Report via Our World in Data

Asked to place their lives on a ladder from nought to ten, New Zealanders average 7.0, eighth of 29 countries. Finland (7.8) and Denmark (7.5) lead, as they have for a decade; the Nordic bloc, the Netherlands, Israel and Switzerland fill the places above New Zealand, with Ireland (6.9), Australia (6.9) and Germany (6.9) just behind. The chart's floor is not poor countries alone: South Korea (6.0) and Japan (6.1) sit beneath Brazil and Poland, and India (4.5) trails everything.

Income buys happiness up this chart, but with spectacular leaks. New Zealand out-satisfies the richer United States (6.8, 13th), Germany (6.9, 11th) and Britain (6.7, 16th); Costa Rica and Mexico famously outperform their incomes in the global table, and East Asia underperforms its own by the widest margin measured. The correlates the *World Happiness Report* identifies, support, freedom, generosity, trust, are exactly the charts New Zealand tops later in this chapter.

The trend tempers the celebration: New Zealand's score has slipped from 7.22 in 2012, Australia's from 7.35 and America's from 7.08, and the report's own analysis locates the decline overwhelmingly among the under-30s, in New Zealand as across the English-speaking world. Eighth place is a fine ranking. A fine ranking on a falling series, driven by the young, is this book's quietest warning.

12.02 Social support

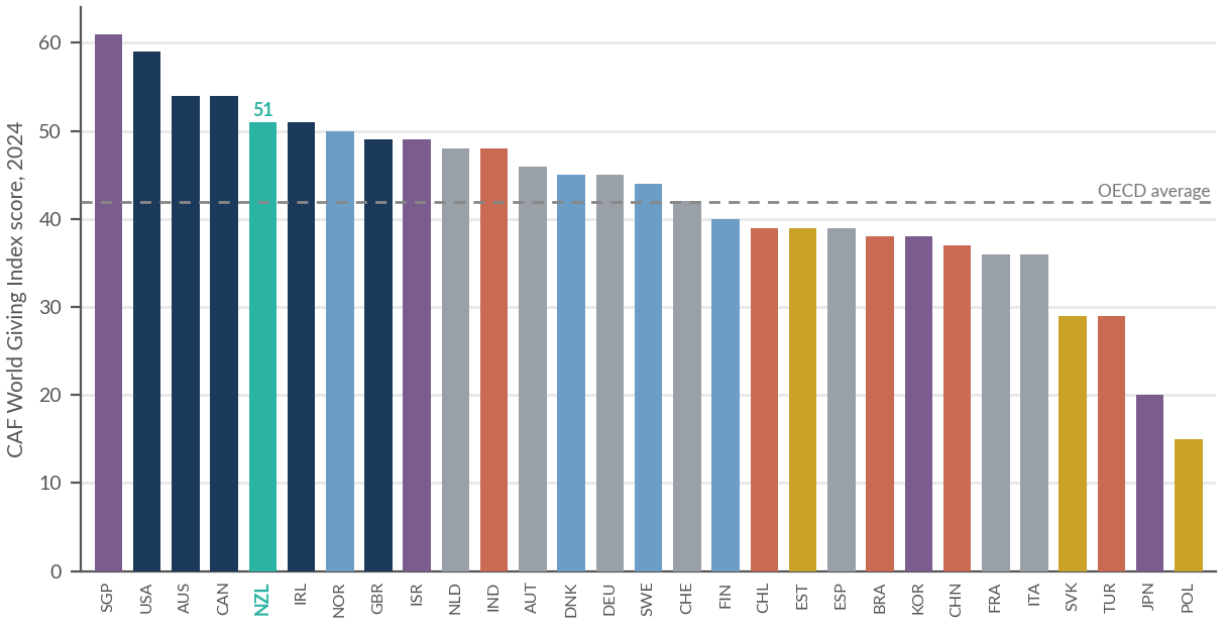


Source: Gallup World Poll via OECD How's Life

Asked whether they have relatives or friends they can count on in trouble, 92.6% of New Zealanders say yes, sixth of 26 countries and within about two points of the leaders: Finland (94.8%), Denmark (94.6%) and Norway (94.5%). The OECD average is 89.9%. At the bottom, and by a distance, sits South Korea at 79.8%, where one person in five reports no one to call, with Turkey, Brazil and Italy nearby.

The measure is the strongest single predictor of life satisfaction in the *World Happiness Report*'s decomposition, stronger than income, and its geography maps this chapter's first chart almost perfectly. New Zealand's high score has survived every domestic disruption of the past two decades, and its loneliness figures in the same OECD database, discussed in *New Zealand by Numbers*, tell the consistent story: a chronic lonely minority of about 4%, small by European standards. The pattern the chart cannot show is the one worth watching: in most countries where it is measured, reported support is thinning among the young, the same cohort driving the satisfaction decline at 12.01. New Zealand's social fabric remains, on the world's best evidence, among the strongest anywhere; the thinning among its young is the place to watch.

12.03 Generosity



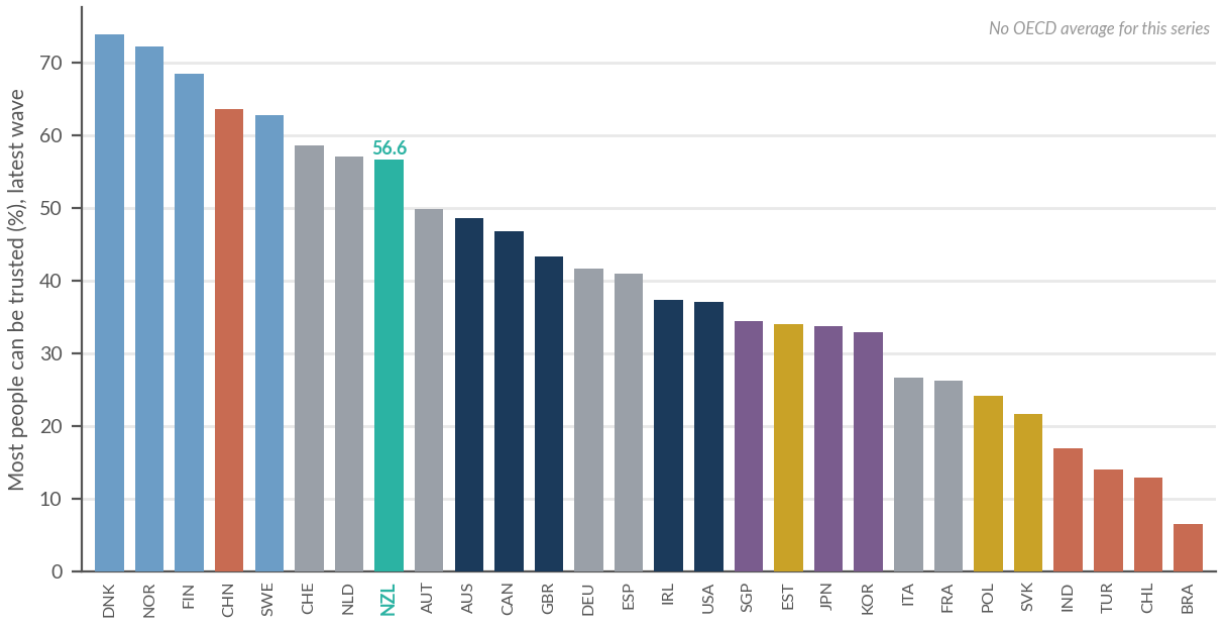
Source: Charities Aid Foundation, World Giving Index

The World Giving Index asks whether people helped a stranger, gave money or volunteered in the past month. New Zealand scores 51, fifth of 29 countries, behind Singapore (61), the United States (59), Australia and Canada (54). The Anglosphere plus its Pacific offshoots dominates giving as measured; the chart's basement mixes Continental Europe and East Asia: Poland at 15, Japan at 20, Turkey and Slovakia at 29, France and Italy at 36.

The ordering is cultural before it is economic. The Nordics, this chapter's champions of satisfaction and trust, mostly sit in the middle here, Norway excepted, their solidarity institutionalised through taxes rather than expressed through charity, while the low-tax Anglosphere gives person to person. Neither model is stingier than the other in total; they route compassion differently, a caution against reading this chart as a morality table.

New Zealand's fifth place squares with the domestic record in *New Zealand by Numbers*: more than half of adults helping or volunteering in a month on the survey it cites, a philanthropic sector worth billions and the informal helping that the index catches better than any official statistic. Whatever else this book has found about the New Zealand economy, the New Zealander remains, by world standards, remarkably willing to stop for a stranger.

12.04 Trust in others



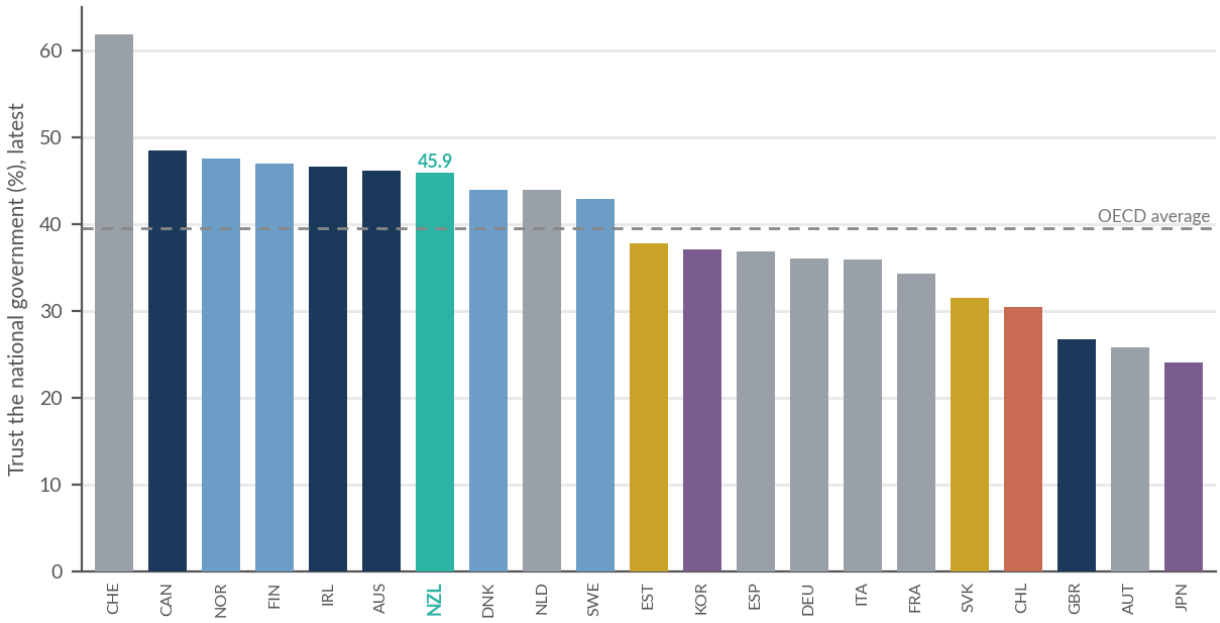
Source: World Values Survey; European Values Study

Can most people be trusted? In New Zealand, 56.6% say yes, eighth of 28 countries, in the high-trust club with Denmark (73.9%), Norway (72.1%), Finland (68.4%) and Sweden (62.8%). The chart's range is enormous: Brazil records 6.5%, Chile 12.9% and Turkey 14.0%, societies in which the stranger is presumed a hazard. France (26.3%) and Italy (26.6%) sit closer to the low-trust world than the high, and China's 63.5% is the chart's contested curiosity, which scholars variously read as real, as deference, or as prudence in answering surveys.

Generalised trust is the social scientist's favourite lubricant: it predicts growth, institutional quality and wellbeing more reliably than most policies, because every transaction taxes itself less where strangers deal in good faith. The Anglosphere's ordering, New Zealand and Australia (48.5%) above Britain (43.3%), all above the United States (37.0%), tracks this book's institutional chapter closely.

Rarer still is New Zealand's direction of travel. Trust has risen here, from 47.5% in the late-1990s wave to 56.6% in the latest, while America stagnated and much of Europe sagged. Migration on New Zealand's scale is often predicted to erode trust; three decades of it, at rates among the developed world's highest, alongside rising trust, is one of the most hopeful findings in this book.

12.05 Trust in government



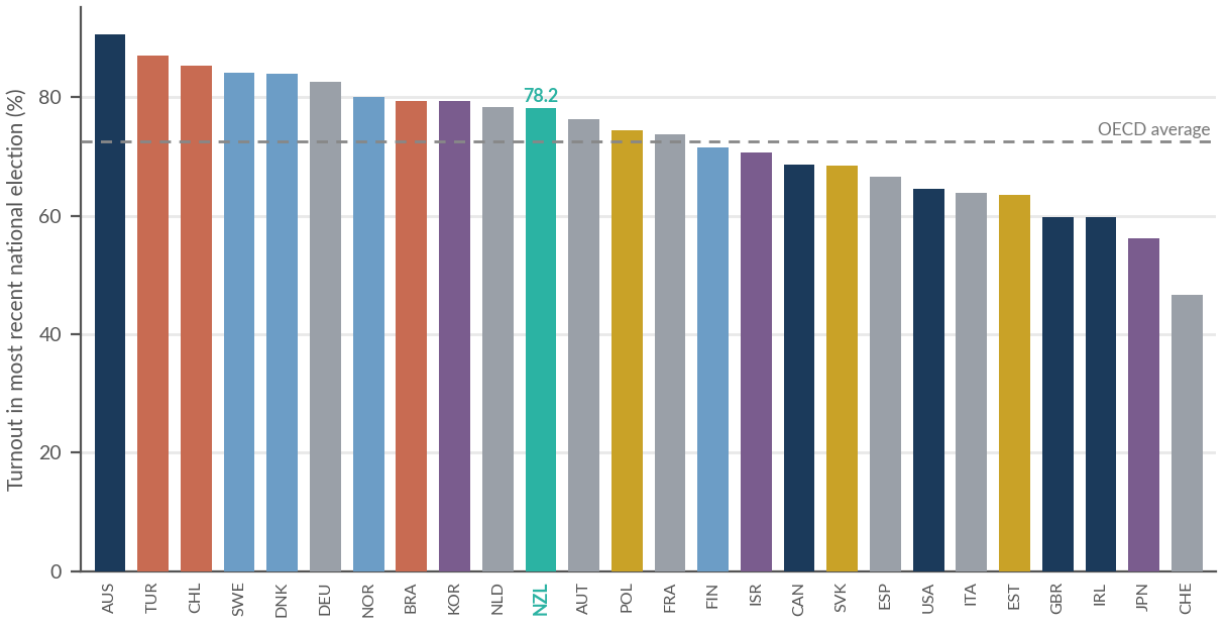
Source: OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

The OECD now measures political trust directly: 45.9% of New Zealanders report high or moderately high trust in the national government, seventh of 21 countries surveyed and six points above the OECD average of 39.6%. Switzerland (61.9%) stands alone at the top, its citizens instructing the state quarterly by referendum, an arrangement often credited for the trust, followed by Canada (48.5%), Norway (47.6%) and Finland (47.0%). At the bottom: Japan (24.0%), Austria (25.8%) and Britain (26.7%), where three-quarters of citizens do not trust the government they elect.

New Zealand's seventh place extends the pattern of this chapter and the last: institutional capital high by world standards, and higher than the domestic mood suggests. The Stats NZ series that *New Zealand by Numbers* reports, showing trust in parliament falling between 2021 and 2023, measures the same object at a grumpier moment; the OECD figure here, collected in 2023, still places New Zealand comfortably in the leading third.

The Swiss number earns the page's last thought, read beside Chapter 11's decentralisation charts. The country where citizens decide most trusts its government most, and the correlation between local power and political trust runs through the whole survey. Trust, on this survey's evidence, is earned less by governments communicating better than by governments small and close enough to watch.

12.06 Voter turnout



Source: OECD How's Life; national electoral commissions

In its 2023 general election, 78.2% of enrolled New Zealanders voted, 11th of 26 countries. Australia's 90.7% leads, purchased by compulsion, as Turkey's 87.1% is; the unforced turnout prize goes to Sweden (84.2%), Denmark (84.0%) and Germany (82.5%), where four in five vote freely. The democratic embarrassments cluster at the bottom: Switzerland's 46.6%, a by-product of referendum fatigue, then Japan (56.3%), Ireland (59.7%) and Britain (59.8%).

New Zealand's four-fifths turnout, achieved without compulsion, places it in the healthy upper-middle of the democratic world, and the change column shows only mild erosion, from 80.3% in 2005, against Britain's slide towards 60% and America's chronic mid-60s presidential ceiling. The domestic long view in *New Zealand by Numbers* records the same gentle decline from the 93.7% peak of 1984, concentrated, as everywhere, among the young.

It is fitting that the book's last chart measures the act on which every other chart depends. The rankings in these pages, productivity lost and trust preserved, houses rationed and institutions held, are all, in the end, choices, and this page counts the choosers. Seventy-eight per cent of New Zealanders still turn up. What they decide to do about the other 111 charts is the next edition's story.

Bibliography

Sources are listed by chapter and alphabetically by organisation. The indicator each source supports is shown in brackets. All URLs were retrieved in June and July 2026.

Chapter One: Population

OECD Family Database; UN DESA; national statistical offices. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_1_1_Family_size_and_composition.xlsx [1.10]

OECD Family Database; UN DESA; national statistical offices. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2022_hh-size-composition.xlsx [1.10]

OECD Family Database; UN DESA; national statistical offices. https://apisidra.ibge.gov.br/values/t/4712/n1/all/v/5930/p/all [1.10]

OECD Family Database; UN DESA; national statistical offices. https://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/202105/t20210510_1817185.html [1.10]

Pew Research Center, Global Religious Landscape. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2025/06/PR_2025.06.09_global-religious-change_appendix-b.pdf [1.09]

UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024 (by origin); World Bank population. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2024_ims_stock_by_sex_and_origin.xlsx [1.08]

UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024 (by origin); World Bank population. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;NLD;DNK;NOR;CHE;SWE;AUT;SVK;SGP;POL;CHN;CHL;EST;DEU;JPN;IND;FRA;TUR;ESP;BRA;ITA;ISR;KOR;FIN/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?date=2024&format=json&per_page=100 [1.08]

UN DESA International Migrant Stock via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SM.POP.TOTL.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.07]

UN World Population Prospects via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/median-age.csv?csvType=full [1.04]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.GROW?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.01]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.01]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.05]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.05]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.DPND.OL?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.06]

World Bank; UN World Population Prospects. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SM.POP.NETM?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.03]

World Bank; UN World Population Prospects. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.03]

World Bank; UN World Urbanization Prospects. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [1.02]

Chapter Two: Children and Families

OECD Family Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_3_1_Marriage_divorce_rates.xlsx [2.03]

OECD Family Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_2_4_Share_births_outside_marriage.xlsx [2.05]

OECD Family Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_1_1_Family_size_and_composition.xlsx [2.07]

OECD Family Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_1_1_Family_size_and_composition.xlsx [2.08]

OECD Family Database; UN Demographic Yearbook. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_3_1_Marriage_divorce_rates.xlsx [2.01]

OECD Family Database; UNECE. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/SF_3_1_Marriage_divorce_rates.xlsx [2.02]

OECD Income Distribution Database. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.INE,DSD_WISE_IDD@DF_IDD/all?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2004 [2.10]

OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX). https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ELS.SPD,DSD_SOCX_AGG@DF_SOCX_AGG/.A.SOCX.PT_B1GQ.ES10._T._T+TP51._Z?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1980 [2.09]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [2.04]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [2.06]

Chapter Three: Health and Mortality

OECD Health Statistics. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ELS.HD,DSD_HEALTH_STAT@DF_AM/all?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2010 [3.11]

OECD; Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/hospital-beds-per-1000-people.csv?csvType=full [3.03]

UN IGME via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.15]

UN IGME via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.DYN.NMRT?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.15]

UN MMEIG via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.14]

WHO Global Health Observatory. https://ghoapi.azureedge.net/api/GDO_q35 [3.09]

WHO via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-of-adults-defined-as-obese.csv?csvType=full [3.08]

WHO via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/death-rate-road-traffic-injuries.csv?csvType=full [3.13]

WHO via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.PRV.SMOK?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.06]

WHO via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.ALC.PCAP.LI?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.07]

WHO via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.STA.SUIC.P5?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.12]

WHO/UNICEF via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.IMM.MEAS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.05]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;A

UT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.10]

World Bank, World Development Indicators.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.MA.IN?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.10]

World Bank, World Development Indicators.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.FE.IN?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.10]

World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.01]

World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.PP.CD?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.01]

World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.XPD.GHED.CH.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.02]

World Bank; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.XPD.OOPC.CH.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.02]

World Bank; WHO; OECD.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.04]

World Bank; WHO; OECD.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SH.MED.NUMW.P3?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [3.04]

Chapter Four: Education

OECD Education at a Glance.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.EDU.IMEP,DSD_EAG_LSO_EA@DF_LSO_NEAC_DISTR_EA/._T.Y25T34.ISCED11A_5T8.....?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2010 [4.05]

OECD PISA 2022. https://stat.link/files/a97db61c-en/d5rsh2.xlsx [4.09]

OECD PISA via How's Life Well-being Database.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.WDP,DSD_HSL@DF_HSL_CWB/all [4.04]

OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) via How's Life.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.WDP,DSD_HSL@DF_HSL_CWB/all [4.06]

UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.uis.unesco.org/api/public/data/indicators?indicator=MSEP.5T8&start=2013&end=2024 [4.07]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.01]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.PRM.PRIV.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.02]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.SEC.PRIV.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.02]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRL.TC.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.03]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.SEC.ENRL.TC.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.03]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;A

UT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SE.PRE.ENRR?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [4.08]

Chapter Five: Crime and Justice

Gallup World Poll via OECD How's Life. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.WDP,DSD_HSL@DF_HSL_CWB/all [5.05]

UNODC via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/homicide-rate-unodc.csv?csvType=full [5.01]

UNODC; NZ Police; national sources. http://web.archive.org/web/20250605085335if_/https://dataunodc.un.org/sites/dataunodc.un.org/files/data_cts_access_and_functioning_of_justice.xlsx [5.04]

UNODC; NZ Police; national sources. https://www.police.govt.nz/news/release/survey-results-show-continued-high-levels-trust-and-confidence-police-0 [5.04]

UNODC; NZ Police; national sources. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2025/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2025 [5.04]

World Prison Brief (ICPR). https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison_population_rate [5.02]

World Prison Brief (ICPR). https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data [5.03]

Chapter Six: Technology and Digital Life

Global Survey of Working Arrangements (WFH Research). https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GSWA-Figures-Data-2023.xlsx [6.07]

Google/Ipsos multi-country survey, 2025. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2026-01/Google%20Ipsos%20Our%20Life%20With%20AI%202025%20Topline.pdf [6.06]

ITU via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [6.03]

ITU via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [6.05]

OECD Broadband Portal. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.STI.DEP,DSD_BB_DATABASE@DF_BB_TEL_DATABASE/..FBB.SUB...PT_SB_FBB?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2010 [6.04]

UN E-Government Development Index 2024. https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Country-Information/id/122-New-Zealand (and 28 sibling country pages) [6.08]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SP.POP.SCIE.RD.P6?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [6.01]

Crawford, Fabling, Grimes and Bonner, 'National R&D and Patenting: Is New Zealand an Outlier?', New Zealand Economic Papers 41(1), 2007. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00779950709558499 [6.02]

World Bank; UNESCO Institute for Statistics; OECD. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [6.02]

Chapter Seven: Labour Market and Productivity

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.01]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.01]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.01]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.EMP.TOTL.SP.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.02]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;A

UT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.06]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.07]

ILO/OECD via World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.UEM.NEET.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [7.08]

ILO; OECD.
https://rplumber.ilo.org/data/indicator/?id=ILR_TUMT_NOC_RT_A&ref_area=NZL+AUS+USA+GBR+CAN+IRL+DNK+NOR+SWE+FIN+DEU+FRA+ITA+ESP+NLD+CHE+AUT+POL+SVK+EST+JPN+KOR+SGP+ISR+CHN+IND+BRA+CHL+TUR&timefrom=1990&fmt=csv [7.04]

OECD Average Annual Wages.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ELS.SAE,DSD_EARNINGS@AV_AN_WAGE/all?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2000 [7.05]

OECD Income Distribution Database.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.INE,DSD_WISE_IDD@DF_IDD/all?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2004 [7.09]

OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX).
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ELS.SPD,DSD_SOCX_AGG@DF_SOCX_AGG/.A.SOCX.PT_B1GQ.ES10._T._T+TP51._Z?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1980 [7.10]

Penn World Table via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-working-hours-per-worker.csv?csvType=full [7.03]

Penn World Table via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/labor-productivity-per-hour-pennworldtable.csv?csvType=full [7.11]

Chapter Eight: Economy

Bank for International Settlements. https://data.bis.org/static/bulk/WS_TC_csv_flat.zip [8.14]

Harvard Growth Lab, Atlas of Economic Complexity. https://api-v2.oec.world/tesseract/data.jsonrecords?cube=complexity_eci_a_hs92_hs6&drilldowns=Country,Year&measures=ECI [8.05]

Harvard Growth Lab, Atlas of Economic Complexity. https://dataverse.harvard.edu/api/access/datafile/13439575 (doi:10.7910/DVN/XTAQMC growth_proj_eci_rankings.csv) [8.05]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.08]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.IND.EMPL.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.08]

ILO modelled estimates via World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/SL.SRV.EMPL.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.08]

IMF World Economic Outlook. https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/GGXWDG_NGDP@WEO [8.10]

IMF, International Merchandise Trade Statistics. https://api.imf.org/external/sdmx/2.1/data/IMF.STA,IMTS (XG_FOB_USD, 2024) [8.04]

IMF; national accounts. https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/exp@FPP [8.11]

OECD Global Revenue Statistics.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.CTP.TPS,DSD_REV_COMP_GLOBAL@DF_RSGLOBAL/..S13._T._T.PT_B1GQ.?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1990 [8.12]

OECD International Transport Forum.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ITF,DSD_INFRINV@DF_INFRINV/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1995 [8.15]

OECD Tax Database.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.CTP.TPS,DSD_TAX_PIT@DF_PIT_TOP_EARN_THRESH/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2000 [8.13]

OECD Tax Database.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.CTP.TPS,DSD_TAX_CIT@DF_CIT/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=2000 [8.13]

UNCTAD; World Bank. https://unctadstat-api.unctad.org/bulkdownload/US.FdiFlowsStock/US_FdiFlowsStock [8.06]

UNCTAD; World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;A

UT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?date=2024&format=json [8.06]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.01]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.02]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.03]

World Bank, World Development Indicators. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NE.GDI.FTOT.ZS?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.07]

World Bank; IMF. https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [8.09]

Chapter Nine: Housing

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/new-homes-around-20-percent-smaller [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/average-floor-area-new-residential-dwellings [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.eia.gov/consumption/residential/data/2020/hc/pdf/HC%2010.9.pdf [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/chapters-for-english-housing-survey-2024-to-2025-headline-findings-on-demographics-and-household-resilience/chapter-1-profile-of-households-and-dwellings [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/statistics/neud/dpa/showTable.cfm?type=CP&sector=res&juris=ca&year=2023&rn=2&page=0 [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-dber/domesticbuildingenergyratingsquarter32024/ [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/api/dissemination/statistics/1.0/data/ilc_hcmh01?format=JSON [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://data.gov.sg/api/action/datastore_search?resource_id=d_8b84c4ee58e3cfc0ece0d773c8ca6abc [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/ [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/file-download?statInfId=000040209864&fileKind=0 [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1593252 [9.08]

National statistical agencies; Eurostat. https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4257 [9.08]

OECD Affordable Housing Database (2018 series). https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HM1-1-Housing-stock-and-construction.xlsx [9.04]

OECD Affordable Housing Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HM1-3-Housing-tenures.xlsx [9.05]

OECD Affordable Housing Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/PH4-2-Social-rental-housing-stock.xlsx [9.06]

OECD Affordable Housing Database. https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HC2-1-Living-space.xlsx [9.07]

OECD Analytical House Price Database. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ECO.MPD,DSD_AN_HOUSE_PRICES@DF_HOUSE_PRICES/.A..?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1990 [9.01]

OECD Analytical House Price Database. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ECO.MPD,DSD_AN_HOUSE_PRICES@DF_HOUSE_PRICES/.A..?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1990 [9.02]

OECD Analytical House Price Database. https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ECO.MPD,DSD_AN_HOUSE_PRICES@DF_HOUSE_PRICES/.A..?format=csvfilewithlabels&startPeriod=1990 [9.03]

Chapter Ten: Energy and Environment

Computed from Jones et al. and World Bank.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.KD?format=json&per_page=20000 [10.03]

Ember; Energy Institute via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-electricity-renewables.csv?csvType=full [10.01]

Ember; Energy Institute via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-electricity-generation.csv?csvType=full [10.05]

GlobalPetrolPrices compilation. https://www.globalpetrolprices.com/electricity_prices/ [10.06]

International Energy Agency via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/electric-car-sales-share.csv?csvType=full [10.04]

Jones et al. via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-ghg-emissions.csv?csvType=full [10.02]

World Bank; OECD.
https://api.worldbank.org/v2/country/NZL;AUS;USA;GBR;CAN;IRL;DNK;NOR;SWE;FIN;DEU;FRA;ITA;ESP;NLD;CHE;AUT;POL;SVK;EST;JPN;KOR;SGP;ISR;CHN;IND;BRA;CHL;TUR/indicator/EN.ATM.PM25.MC.M3?format=json&per_page=20000&date=1960:2026 [10.07]

Chapter Eleven: Government and Institutions

Fraser Institute, Economic Freedom of the World. https://efotw.org/api/economic-data?year=2023 [11.05]

OECD Product Market Regulation Indicators.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ECO.GCRD,DSD_PMR@DF_PMR/.PMR.?format=csvfilewithlabels [11.04]

OECD Product Market Regulation Indicators.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.ECO.GCRD,DSD_PMR@DF_PMR_WBG/.PMR.?format=csvfilewithlabels [11.04]

OECD/UCLG World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.CFE.RDG,DSD_SNG_WOFI@DF_FINANCE/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels [11.07]

OECD/UCLG World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.CFE.RDG,DSD_SNG_WOFI@DF_SNG_STRUCT/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels [11.08]

Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index. https://rsf.org/en/index [11.06]

Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index.
https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2025_Results.xlsx [11.02]

World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators.
https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/govindicators/doc/wgidataset.xlsx [11.01]

World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index. https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/downloads/2025_wjp_rule_of_law_index_HISTORICAL_DATA_FILE.xlsx [11.03]

Chapter Twelve: Wellbeing and Society

Charities Aid Foundation, World Giving Index. https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/inside-giving/wgi/wgi2024.pdf [12.03]

Gallup World Poll via OECD How's Life.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.WDP,DSD_HSL@DF_HSL_CWB/all [12.02]

OECD How's Life; national electoral commissions.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.WISE.WDP,DSD_HSL@DF_HSL_CWB/all [12.06]

OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.GOV.GIP,DSD_GOV_TDG_SPS_GPC@DF_GOV_TDG_SPS_GPC_2023/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels [12.05]

OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.GOV.GIP,DSD_GOV_INT@DF_GOV_TDG_2025/.....?format=csvfilewithlabels [12.05]

OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions.
https://sdmx.oecd.org/public/rest/data/OECD.GOV.GIP,DSD_GOV_TDG_2025 (2025 edition) [12.05]

World Happiness Report via Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/happiness-cantril-ladder.csv?csvType=full [12.01]

World Values Survey; European Values Study. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/self-reported-trust-attitudes.csv?csvType=full [12.04]