

DIGITAL INCLUSION AND WELLBEING IN NEW ZEALAND



An Executive Summary of Motu Working Paper 19-17

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SUMMARY HAIKU

Internet access:

A good thing that fades like snow

And some groups miss out.

INTRODUCTION

We examine two main questions relating to internet (and other ICT) access:

- Which groups have a lower likelihood of being digitally included in New Zealand (and why)?
- How does digital inclusion relate to waiora/wellbeing?

In examining the first question, we pay particular attention to the situation for Māori and Pasifika relative to other ethnic groups.

Existing research examines aspects of who is digitally excluded. It is, however, important also to examine how access relates to people's wellbeing alongside their access and use. Our second question starts to address whether internet access is beneficial for specific communities.

METHODOLOGY

We use four large-scale surveys of New Zealanders that include information on internet availability. Some of the surveys also include information on availability of other ICT related items and on internet use. The surveys are:

- New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS, surveyed in 2018);
- New Zealand Electoral Survey (NZES, 2017);
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2015);
- Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC, 2014/15).

We place most emphasis on NZCVS and NZES as they are the most recent of the surveys. We also consider PISA as it includes adolescents as well as containing added information on how adolescents use the internet. The surveys are each well sampled but all the figures must nonetheless be treated as having some degree of sampling error.

ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

A number of groups are prone to relatively low access to the internet, including:

- People living in social housing;
- People with disabilities;
- Pasifika;
- Māori;
- People living in larger country towns (10,000 – 25,000 people);
- Older members of society, particularly those aged over 75 years; and
- Unemployed people and those not actively seeking work.

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The first two of these groups – those in social housing and people with disabilities – appear to be particularly disadvantaged with respect to internet access. Pasifika students (in 2015) also reported substantially lower rates of internet access than did students of other ethnicities.

Just 69% of those living in Housing NZ (or local equivalent) social housing report having access to the internet, compared with 91% reporting access across all respondents (in the 2017 NZES).

Only 71% of people with disabilities report having access to the internet (in the 2017 NZES). In the 2018 NZCVS, 17% of people with disabilities indicate having no internet access compared to the full sample where just 5% have no internet access.

These large gaps in internet access for those who live in social housing and for people with disabilities are potentially amenable to policy interventions. Most social housing is owned by the state, local authorities or NGOs. The social housing provider could take the initiative to install WiFi (or other technologies) to enable internet access by tenants. Provision of such infrastructure may be considered of similar importance to provision of water, sewerage and electricity to these tenants. Such provision is also likely to improve internet access rates for Pasifika students.

Similarly, many people with disabilities are already subject to some form of care by state agencies or NGOs. These authorities may consider enabling internet use for their clients as a key intervention to improve the opportunities for those with disabilities to connect with the rest of society.

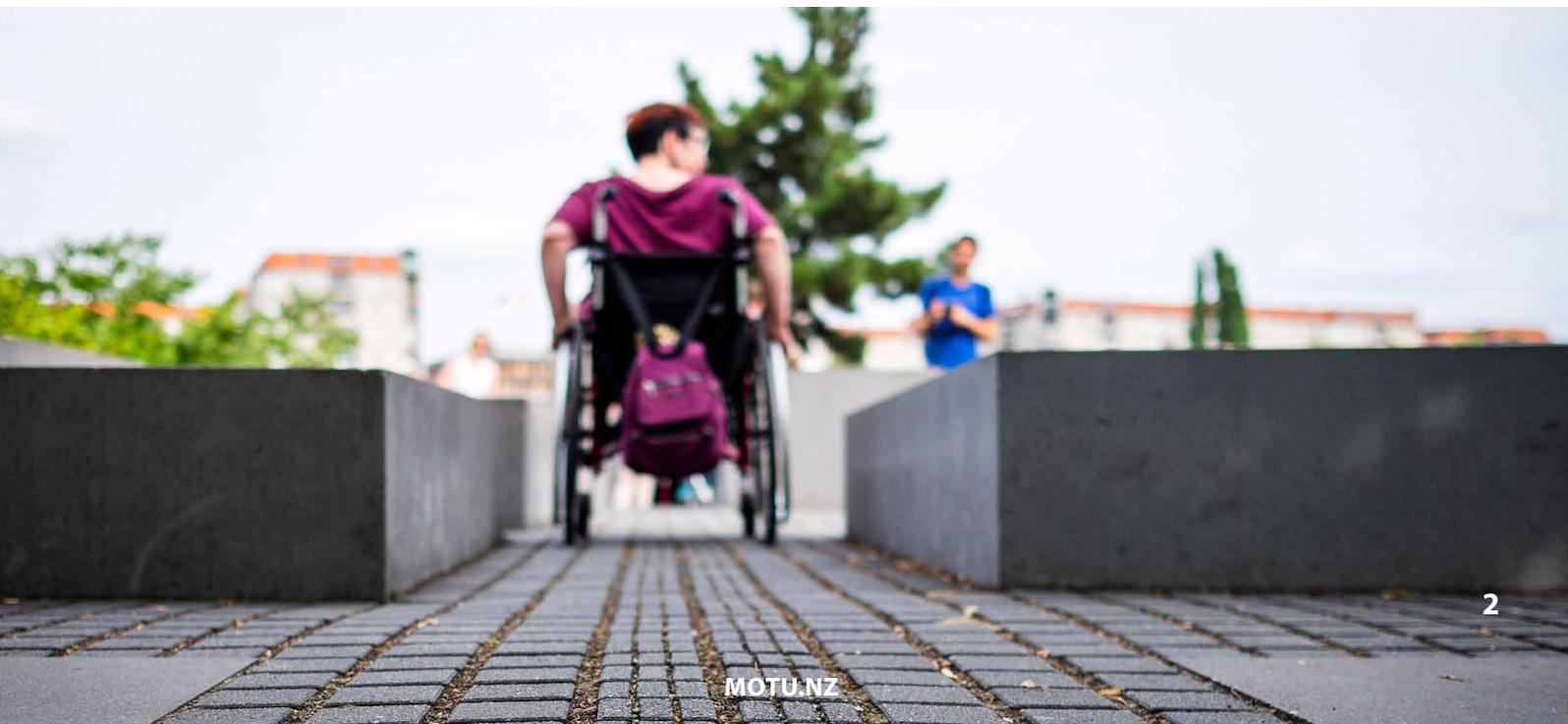
People with disabilities are also at greater risk than others from an internet violation (i.e. a virus infection or other internet interference). Other at-risk groups include individuals who are not actively seeking work, unemployed, Māori, Pasifika, younger people, and those who are studying.

WELLBEING AND INTERNET USE

We investigate the association between various wellbeing indicators and internet use. As we have used cross-sectional data we cannot draw causal conclusions on the nature of these associations.

Our key findings are:

- NZCVS (adult) data indicate that those who do not have internet access tend to have lower subjective wellbeing than those who do have access.
- NZES (adult) data show a similar relationship (using a proxy variable for wellbeing) when we do not control for other (e.g. demographic) factors, but we find no relationship once we control for these other factors.
- NZES data show that people without internet access are less engaged in civic activities such as voting in general elections and making submissions to government.
- PISA (adolescent) data indicate that those without internet access tend to have lower subjective wellbeing than those with access (which may reflect family circumstances).
- PISA data also indicate that as internet use on weekdays outside of school increases, students' subjective wellbeing declines; once daily internet use exceeds about two hours, we find no positive association between internet use and wellbeing.





The PISA data show that 15% of 15-year olds (including 27% of Māori students) report using the internet for more than 6 hours per day on a weekday outside of school, while over half report more than two hours' use.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

We recommend that policy consideration be given to two particularly at-risk groups: social housing residents, and individuals with disabilities. A range of policy interventions already addresses issues faced by each of these groups. There appears to be a strong case that interventions be extended to enabling internet access for these individuals.

Those who work with youth (and their family members) may wish to give consideration to assessing the effects of prolonged use of the internet by adolescents. Our associative results – while not establishing a causal link – highlight a potential concern relating to wellbeing outcomes for those with prolonged internet use. We recommend further investigation of the wellbeing effects of extended use of the internet – both for adolescents and, if the data is available, for children and adults.

We also recommend further analysis of emerging and future PISA, NZCVS and PIAAC data relating to internet (and ICT) access and use. These analyses will be able to leverage the links that these surveys will shortly have to Statistics NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). By linking the survey results to prior characteristics of the surveyed individuals and of their localities (via the IDI), researchers will be able to better control for personal and other traits that affect both wellbeing and internet (and other ICT) access and use.

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