

# New Zealand's First-Ever Budget for 'Well-Being' Will Focus on Poverty and Mental Health

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Child poverty, domestic violence, and mental health are priorities in the budget.

## **Why Global Citizens Should Care**

Investing in mental health and overall well-being of a population can boost socio-economic factors like life expectancy, wealth, and educational attainment. Achieving the UN Global Goals is key to ensuring all these factors, eliminating poverty, and uplifting the economies. You can help end extreme poverty by taking action here.

New Zealand is set to become the first country to account for “well-being” in its annual budget, which will roll out May 30. The inaugural budget allocation will focus on addressing child poverty, domestic violence, and mental health, according to Grant Robertson, New Zealand’s finance minister.

On Tuesday, Robertson said that despite New Zealand’s “rockstar” economic status, the well-being of many New Zealanders was unaccounted for, with home ownership at its lowest in 60 years, high suicide rates, increasing homelessness, and a rising need for food aid grants. “Sure, we had — and have — GDP growth rates that many other countries around the world envied, but for many New Zealanders, this GDP growth had not translated into higher living standards or better opportunities,” Robertson said. “How could we be a rockstar, they asked, with homelessness, child poverty and inequality on the rise?”

“For me, well-being means people living lives of purpose, balance, and meaning to them, and having the capabilities to do so,” said Robertson.

According to the Guardian, other countries such as the United Kingdom have also started to measure national well-being. However, New Zealand is reportedly the first country to carve out a budget specifically dedicated to improving well-being and ask its ministries to implement policies focused on improving overall well-being.

“We must accept that the race to grow our economies makes us all poorer if it comes at the cost of our environment, or leaves our people behind,” New Zealand’s Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, wrote in an op-ed for the Financial Times in January. Among the budget’s priorities are supporting the mental health of all New Zealanders, but particularly of those under the age of 24.

“From a purely economic perspective, there are clear benefits to supporting positive mental well-being, including enhanced productivity,” Ardern also wrote. New Zealand ranked eighth in the World Happiness Report released by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network earlier this year.

“What stands out about the happiest and most well-connected societies is their resilience and ability to deal with bad things,” John Helliwell, co-editor of the report told CNN.

Earlier this year, Arden was praised worldwide for her compassionate and swift response to one of the deadliest mass shootings in her country. Wearing a hijab, to show respect, Arden visited families of the Muslim victims and pledged to cover the funeral costs of all victims. She also worked to ban semi-automatic weapons in the country immediately.

“After the 2011 earthquake and now the terrorist attack in Christchurch — with high social capital, where people are connected — people rally and help each other and (after the earthquake) rebuild immediately,” Helliwell said about New Zealand’s status.