



# CHILDREN'S VOICE

# 2025

*Summary*



**Save the Children**



# Summary of the CHILDREN'S VOICE 2025 Survey

Children's Voice is an annual survey that Save the Children has conducted since 2001. The aim of the survey is to raise the experiences of children and young people to public debate and decision-making. This year's survey focused on children's and young people's experiences on well-being, everyday life and their families' livelihood.

Data collection for the survey was implemented in two steps. In the first step, (27.3.-7.4.2025) responses were gathered from 1,030 persons aged 9–17 living in Continental Finland with Verian's internet panels, which are representative of the population. In the second step (22.4.-13.5.2025), Save the Children implemented a Webropol online survey aimed at persons age 12–17, to which 1,211 children and young persons responded.

In both surveys, respondents assessed their financial situation rather similarly. About half of the respondents assessed their families had a high income, while 19% (Verian) and 13% (Webropol) assessed their families to have a low income.

## Poverty means shortcomings in everyday life for children

Almost a fifth of children from low-income families feel that there is not enough food at home on a regular basis. Food is described as unvaried, with refrigerators often being empty. Any purchases must be carefully considered. For many, this also means compromising on hygiene products and necessary medicine. Even items sold in flea markets might be too expensive.

|                                        | Low income | All respondents | High income |
|----------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Insufficient and unvaried diet at home | 19 %       | 7 %             | 4 %         |

Children reported poverty to be a cause of anxiety, shame for their family's situation and guilt arising from their own needs, as they understood that their family was facing difficult financial situations. Financial difficulties were particularly emphasised in single-parent families, which often have even fewer resources and whose everyday challenges pile up.

Children reported setting aside their own needs and desires or fulfilling them independently through money earned from summer jobs, for example. Sometimes they even participated in joint purchases for the family.

The family's financial situation has a significant impact on the opportunities of children and young people to participate in leisure activities. Only 28% of respondents from low-income families felt that they could participate in leisure activities like other people their age, and almost half reported that hobbies were too expensive for them. Many had to stop practising their hobbies or seeking alternatives that were free of charge. Respondents felt that limited leisure opportunities increased the sense of social exclusion.

# Poverty has a negative impact on children’s well-being

The responses show that stress and challenges to one’s mental health are common amongst children and young people. Of all respondents, 36% felt that their mental health was in a good state, while only 23% of people from low-income backgrounds felt the same. Many respondents also found it difficult to relate positively to themselves.

|                                    | Low income | All respondents | High income |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| I am satisfied with myself as I am | 31 %       | 50 %            | 61 %        |

The impact of the financial situation on well-being is highlighted in the experiences of children and young people from low-income families, which are generally more negative than others. When the family’s everyday life revolves around anxiety and uncertainty, this is reflected in one’s mood and emotional well-being. Children describe the sadness, anxiety and stress caused by financial issues to weaken their ability to cope and positive experiences in everyday life.

|                                                | Low income | All respondents | High income |
|------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| I am worried about my parents’ ability to cope | 42 %       | 20 %            | 13 %        |

Many children from low-income families have to bear the anxiety of their family’s financial situation and their own needs from an early age. The situation is felt to be stressful and unfair, as one’s childhood is much more stressful than that of others. Children being concerned about their parents’ ability to cope is another form of sharing responsibilities. Children report feeling anxiety over their parents’ financial stress, which negatively impacts the atmosphere at home.

# Poverty worsens the outlook for the future

**” Future prospects are restricted by a lack of money, sense of hopelessness, stress and concerns about the family’s well-being.**

Views about the future were clearly bleaker amongst respondents from low-income families than amongst other respondents, with fewer expecting their futures to be stable, care-free, hopeful or safe. Confidence in finding a meaningful place to study or work and in finding meaningful human relationships was also lower compared to other respondents. Most respondents’ hopes for the future prioritised financial stability and higher income. Cuts to social security and their impacts in everyday coping now and in the future were a particular cause for concern.

## Poverty in families with children can be prevented

According to the respondents to the Children's Voice survey, families facing financial strain should be supported materially, such as through food donations and financial aid. Hobby opportunities that were free of charge were also considered important. In addition, many wish for tax relief for people with low income and extending child benefits to the age of 18.

The respondents hope from the decision-makers for a rethinking and reversal of cuts in various sectors, a stronger commitment to supporting the well-being of children and young people, and a better understanding and consideration of the views of children and young people. Children and young people are particularly worried about matters related to mental health, for which they hoped for more timely support and more services.

## What should decision-makers do on a national level?

- The legislative changes in 2024–2025 and the overall reform of social assistance further increase the at-risk-of-poverty-rate among children and weaken fundamental and human rights. There should be no further reductions in social security. All legislative changes for 2026 that increase poverty amongst families with children should be rejected. Previous decisions that have had a negative impact on children's rights and interests should also be reversed on the basis of the impact assessments.
- With the National Child Strategy, poverty amongst families with children and social exclusion can be systematically prevented in advance across administrative levels. The functional ability of the Child Strategy must be ensured so that Finland can continue its commitments to the goals of the European Child Guarantee and the plan to reduce national poverty and social exclusion, which aims to reduce the number of people facing poverty and social exclusion by 100,000 by the year 2030. Of these, a third should be children. The fight against poverty should consider challenges faced in both rural and urban areas.
- Children living in poverty should be better heard when drafting laws and enacting policy programmes, and hearings should prevent decisions that negatively impact children's interests.
- Children and families with children should be informed about services and Kela benefits they are entitled to more efficiently.
- Reforms to social security should better account for families facing the risk of cross-generational poverty and social exclusion, such as single-parent households, immigrant families and families suffering from illnesses.
- Employment of parents should be supported, and part-time job opportunities should be increased. Work-life balance should be promoted. Services supporting employment should identify the impacts of a diverse family background.
- Finland should continue its ambitious commitment to Goal 1 of Agenda2030, which aims to reduce poverty both nationally and globally.

## What should decision-makers do in well-being services counties?

- At the start of regional council term, well-being service counties should ensure that officeholders, professionals and decision-makers have sufficient information about assessing child impacts and child budgeting and to systematically put these tools into regular use when preparing decisions.
- The customer fees for basic healthcare increased by 22.5% at the start of 2025, while specialised healthcare fees increased by 45% at the same time. Customer fees should not be raised any further.
- Children and families with children should have equal opportunities to get sufficient and timely social and healthcare services, even digitally, regardless of the well-being service county they live in. People living in rural or urban areas must not be in an unequal position.
- Preventive mental health services targeted towards children, young people and parents of children should respond in time to the needs of people living in each well-being service county. In mental health services concerning children and young people, information should be transferred seamlessly between municipal and well-being service county professionals. Parents should not bear primary responsibility for ensuring the flow of information.
- Social work in well-being services counties should guarantee sufficient resources for ensuring a sufficient supplementary and preventive social assistance for those who need it.
- Families should have sufficient support and guidance for parenthood available via family work and home services. In order to support the good growth and development of children, early support should also be available in maternity and child health clinics and other healthcare services.

## What should decision-makers do in municipalities?

- At the start of the new term, municipalities should allocate their budgets to at least one free and enjoyable activity for children during the school day in both urban and rural municipalities, in preparation for the further reduction of state support for the implementation of the Finnish model for leisure activities.
- The experiences of children and young people from low-income families must be heard in municipal decision-making, such as in financial decisions, the preparation of welfare plans and welfare reports, and solutions to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion must be actively sought with them.
- In order to promote the mental well-being of children and young people, preventive support and genuine encounters in young people's everyday environments must be available in good time. This requires strengthening cooperation between the social and cultural sectors, youth work, parish youth work and schools, and ensuring adequate resources.
- Ways to escape the sense of loneliness amongst children and young people experiencing poverty and low income must be actively sought out.
- Municipalities must secure equal opportunities for education. As the network of upper secondary schools is shrinking, municipalities must actively seek solutions where equal access to education is still possible despite possible long distances. For these reasons too, student housing aid must not be further reduced.

- Municipalities should organise employment services so that parents of children living in poverty are better employed and have permanent employment relationships. This work should be done actively alone or jointly with other municipalities.
- Immigrant families have a high risk of social exclusion and financial difficulties. For this reason, integration and employment services should not be reduced.
- Municipalities must assess the need for arranging acute food or clothing assistance together with companies and the third sector.

## What can we do together?

- We can encourage and reinforce the respectful and dignified encounter and treatment of other people, so that everyone, regardless of their economic situation, can feel that they are a valued member of their community.
- We must harness the power of communities to reduce poverty in child families. The role of various organisations, associations and enterprises, parishes and sports clubs, as well as digital support and local communities, is important in supporting the daily lives of children and families. It is important to work together across sectoral boundaries, drawing on the expertise of the public and third sectors.
- Local authorities must be guaranteed the resources to assist families with income difficulties through counselling and adequate financial assistance.
- The opportunities for children and young people to be heard and addressed must be promoted in communities, for example through joint meetings and events and through the use of digital means. The wishes of the children can be heard and, for example, free hobby experiments can be organised in cooperation with the municipality and hobby associations.