



RESEARCH

How are Finns doing?

A study of Finns' concerns and views on fairness and future prospects in 2023

Foreword

E2 Research is a multidisciplinary, independent research organisation. We are dedicated to provide valuable insights that help understand the Finnish society and its people. We offer research and expert services to companies, foundations, municipalities, ministries and the media.

Our study of Finns' concerns, capabilities and future prospects, published on 31 October 2023, provoked vibrant discussion in Finnish society. This presentation offers you the key findings in English. We hope you find the study useful. Should you have any questions or other information needs, we would be happy to hear from you.

This study helps predict people's behaviour and identify signals that decision makers shouldn't ignore. Finland will stay strong and withstand crises when we sit up and pay attention to symptoms before they become problems.

Karina Jutila, Director, E2 Research
[Kuntalehti newspaper, 1 November 2023](#)



Helsinki, 15 December 2023

Karina Jutila
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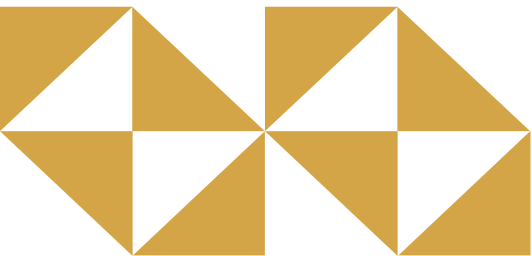
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Participants in this survey on Finnish attitudes provided their answers via a Dynata online panel. The survey was conducted in August 2023 (N=1,070). In addition, the review drew upon equivalent survey results from early April 2023 (N=1,026).



1 Finns' coping capabilities and concerns



In general, Finns believe they are quite capable of coping with daily life: over two-thirds (71%) believe their coping capabilities are largely positive and as many as one-third (33%) of respondents feel they are using almost their full potential.

Almost one in five (19%) feel they are poorly capable of coping, while few (7%) respondents feel their potential is almost completely wasted.

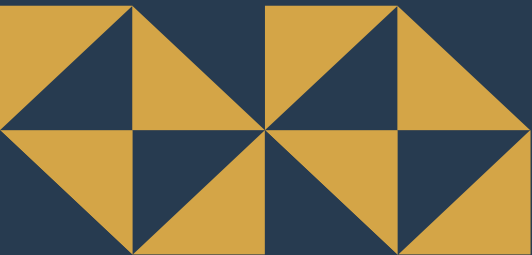
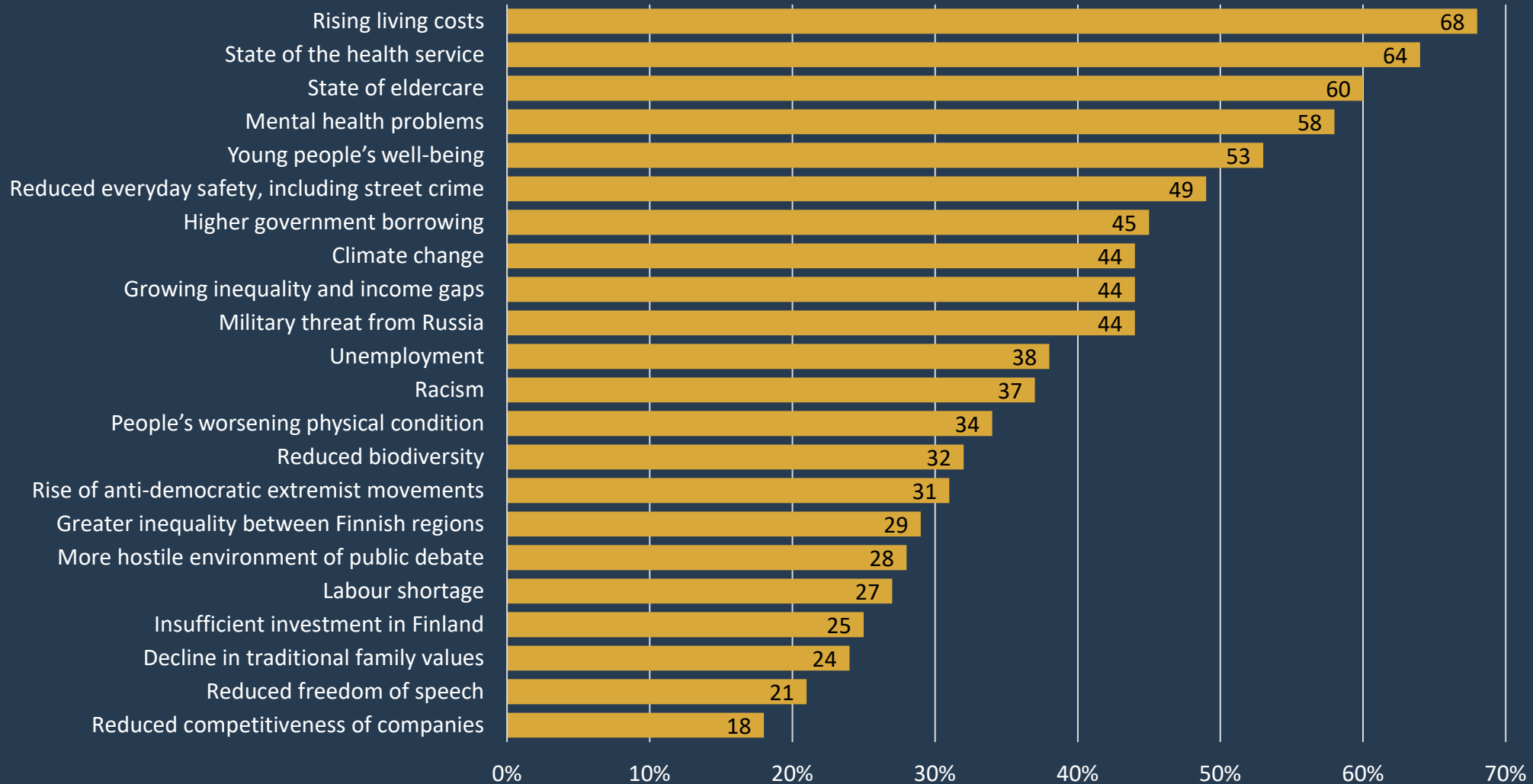


FIGURE I. Which issues in Finnish society concern you? In the following list, select the issues which you think Finnish politicians and other decision makers ought to particularly make an impact on now (%).



Rising living costs and a crumbling welfare state top Finns' list of concerns

Everyday bread-and-butter issues top the list of Finns' concerns. As **Figure 1** shows, rising living costs (68%) are by far the issue that concerns Finns the most. The rise in energy and food prices has slowed down, but many groceries and consumer goods still cost more than a year ago.

Another common concern for Finns relates to human welfare and the related services. The majority is concerned by the state of the health service (64%), eldercare (60%), mental health problems (58%) and young people's well-being (53%). A third common concern is everyday safety, which almost one in two (49%) Finns is concerned about.


Even though young people's well-being is a cause for concern, at the same time many young people are aiming high. All age groups display ambition and a focus on goals, but particularly the young. Of the under-25s, 58% agree somewhat or completely with the statement, "I am ambitious and constantly set myself new goals". Age makes a difference: the level of ambition declines with age.

Almost 40% of Finns are concerned about racism. It is a greater concern among the under-25s than other age groups.

Climate change (44%) and reduced biodiversity (32%) also concern many people. Previous studies have shown that people are less concerned about climate change when the economy enters a downturn. However, the economic outlook does not seem to significantly reduce Finns' concerns about climate change. With regard to climate change, the differences between age groups are small — there is even slightly greater concern among older age groups.

Further down the list of concerns are the labour shortage, insufficient investment in Finland and companies' reduced competitiveness. Even though these are crucial issues for Finland's success, in people's minds they carry less weight than bread-and-butter issues.

All age groups display ambition and a focus on goals, but particularly the young.



The war in Ukraine continues to concern Finns, but the situation seems to have normalized

In its survey in the spring of 2023, E2 Research found that 54% of Finns were concerned by international conflicts and wars. In addition, as many as 72% considered security the most important value upon which Finland as a nation ought to be based. No other option was selected as often by survey respondents. In August 2023, just under half (44%) were concerned by the military threat from Russia.

The concern is still relatively great, but the continuing war in Ukraine and the “normalization” of the situation are likely to have reduced acute concern about Russia. Many Finns also agree with the opinion that NATO membership bolsters security and provides certainty in a changed environment.

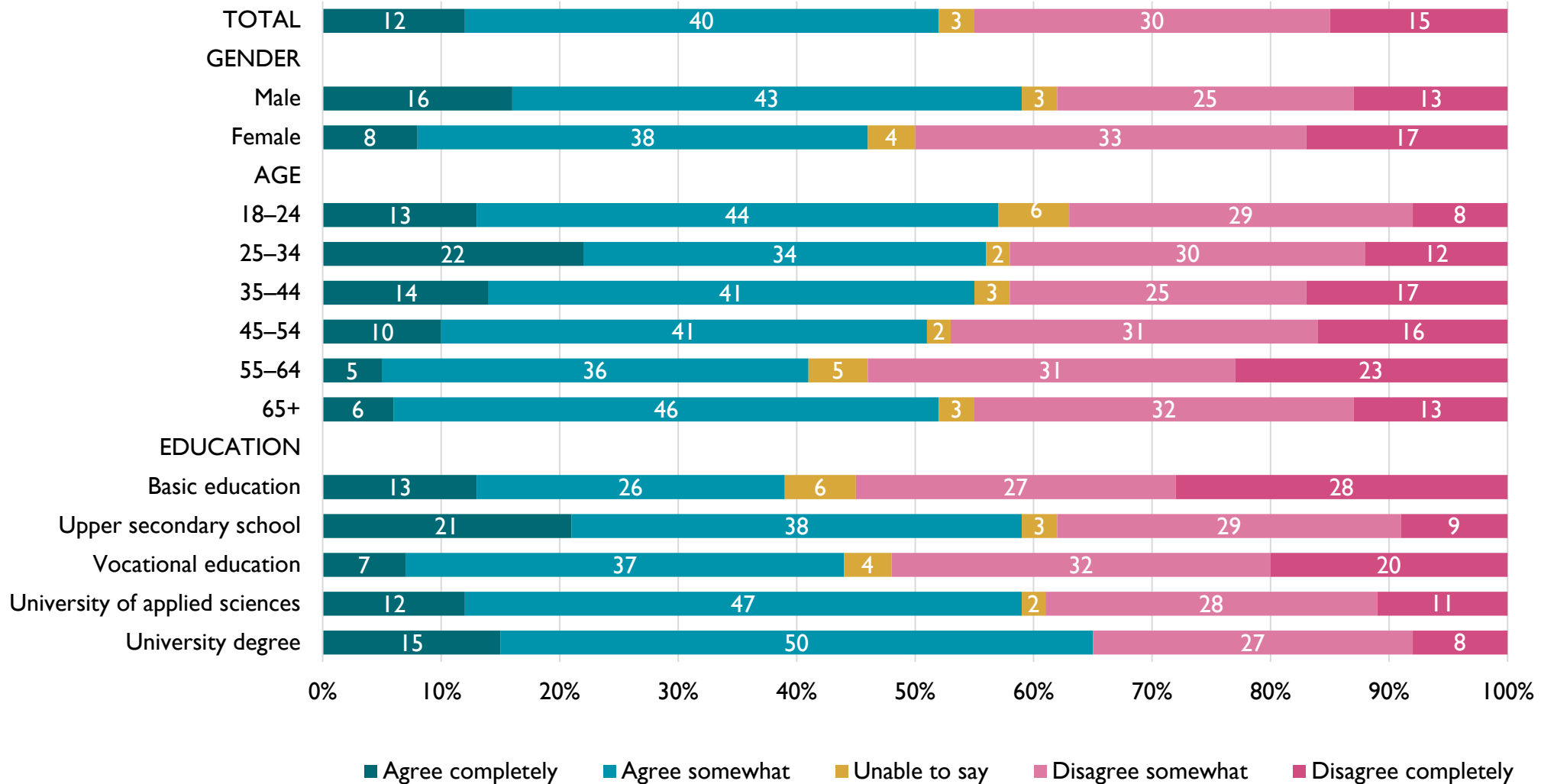
Finns see the coexistence of Finland and Russia as neighbours as a significantly larger source of threats than of opportunities (see Figure 3, below). Russia’s aggressive foreign policy and relentless violence, as well as Finland’s accession to NATO, have fundamentally changed the two countries’ relations. There is no foreseeable path which would substantially alter this situation. Finns’ categorically negative position on coexistence with Russia are another sign of this.

72% of Finns consider security the most important value upon which Finland as a nation ought to be based.

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Views on fairness of Finnish society

FIGURE 2. I consider Finnish society fair to people like me (according to gender, age and educational achievement, %).



August data

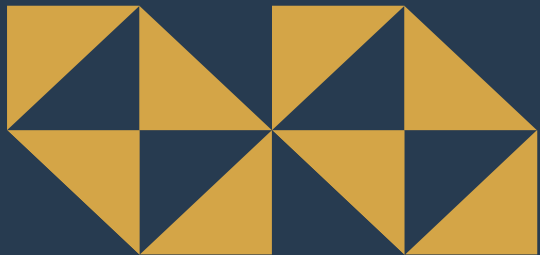
Fewer than one in two women feels society is fair to people like them


Around 60% of men consider society fair to people like them, while significantly fewer women (46%) hold the same view (Figure 2). The survey did not establish the causes of this difference, but the reasons may relate to women's lower income levels and the sharing of housework in families, as well as the imbalance of power in working life and society more broadly.

Broken down by age, the cohort that considers society the least fair is those aged between 55 and 64. There are also clear differences in perceptions of fairness between people with different levels of educational achievement. Fewer than one in two respondents who have only completed basic or vocational education consider society fair to people like them. Meanwhile, two in three respondents who have completed upper secondary school, a university of applied sciences or university consider society fair.

Men and women have different perceptions of fairness, but also hold different concerns. The survey shows that women are slightly more concerned by almost all of the issues listed in Figure 1. This may relate to their everyday lives, such as caring for relatives, and to their lower incomes compared to men, which may increase everyday uncertainty. However, previous studies have also explained the differences through gender-related cultural expectations. Women have traditionally been expected to take greater care of relatives than men; they have also traditionally been allowed to express concern more than men.

Finnish society is known internationally for its equality — in many aspects, Finland performs well in international comparisons. However, it is important to identify potential signals of declining gender equality and react to them.





There's been a lot of discussion in Finland about stagnant salaries in female-dominated sectors, the well-being service counties, the structural change in healthcare services, and the related problems, so maybe that's where the explanation lies. Many of the great changes of our time affect women more than men.

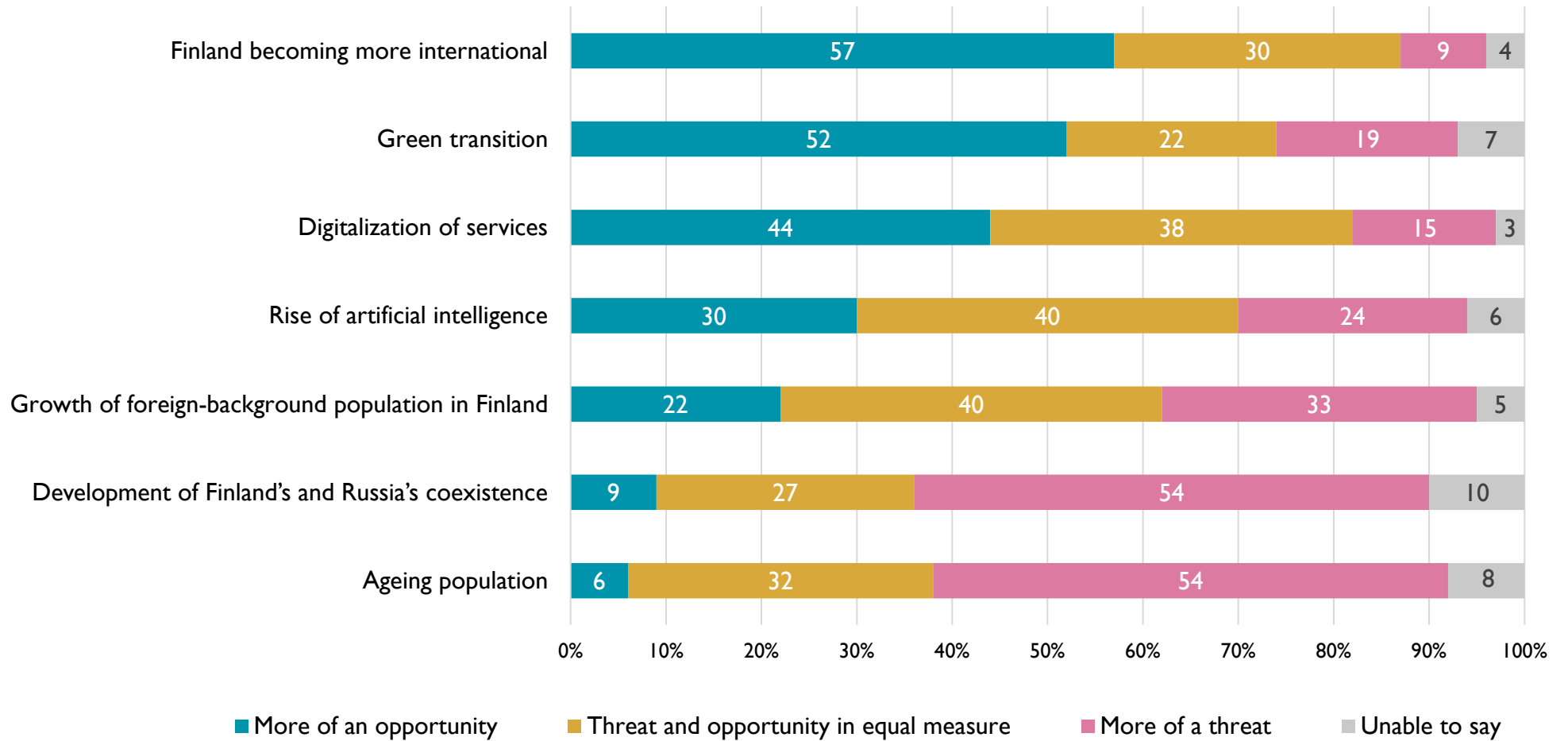
Ville Pitkänen, Research Director, E2 Research
[Yle News, 31 October 2023](#)



3

Finland's direction

FIGURE 3. What is your assessment of the following societal scenarios: to what extent do they represent threats and opportunities?



August data

Finns see a more international Finland and the green transitions as opportunities.

By contrast, the growth in the population with a foreign background and the rise of AI divide opinions.

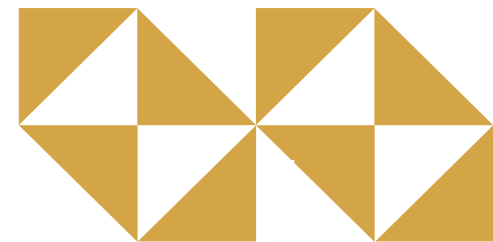
Finns overwhelmingly consider a more international Finland a positive thing (**Figure 3**). This view is widely shared by all ages and genders, but the great divider is education: 76% of university graduates consider a more international Finland an opportunity, whereas only 39% of those with basic education are of the same view.

By contrast, attitudes to the growth in the share of the Finnish population with a foreign background are more critical. The survey found that 22% of Finns primarily see this growth as presenting opportunities, while 33% primarily considered it a threat.

Finns generally see the green transition and the digitalization of services as opportunities, or they are not seen as such large threats. The favourable attitude toward the green transition may be explained by the positive impact of wind power construction on Finland, such as municipal tax receipts and increased regional activity. Domestic energy generation also enables decoupling from Russian fossil fuels and energy dependency.

By contrast, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) divides opinions. The survey found that 30% of Finns see the spread of AI as mostly presenting opportunities, while 24% considered it more of a threat. Men (35%) considered AI a source of opportunities slightly more than women (26%). The groups whose views were significantly more positive than average were the under-25s (44%) and university graduates (42%).

Finns almost universally see the ageing of the population as a threat to societal development. A likely explanation for this is the public conversation about the labour shortage and the well-being service counties' funding problems. Given that the ageing of the population is a fact, the perception of this multifaceted issue exclusively as a threat is surprising and one-sided. This is a clear shortcoming in the public conversation and in Finland's development.





Majority of Finns do not think the country is going in the right direction

Significantly more Finnish men (34%) than women (21%) believe that Finland is going in the right direction (Figure 4). When looking at employment status, the unemployed particularly stand out: as many as 78% of them think that Finland is going in the wrong direction.

There are also differences between income levels: the higher a respondent's income, the more likely they were to say that Finland was going in the right direction. Most respondents earning less than €2,500 per month believe that Finland is going in the wrong direction.

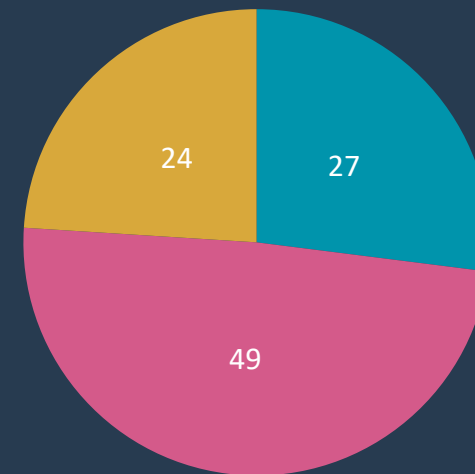
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If the foundations of our welfare and welfare state start to crumble and more people start to feel that they are not getting value for their tax euros, it will, at the very least, weaken people's trust in the short term. In the longer term, polarization and confrontation between different groups could deepen.

Ville Pitkänen, Research Director, E2 Research

[Yle, 31 October 2023](#)

FIGURE 4. Generally speaking, do you think Finland is going in the right or in the wrong direction? (%)



■ In the right direction ■ In the wrong direction ■ Unable to say

August data



Despite concerns and problems, a large majority of Finns continues to look to the future with confidence.

70% of Finns trust either somewhat or completely in society's capacity to overcome difficulties.

Among all the concerns and experiences of unfairness, Finns continue to trust that Finnish society can overcome difficulties. Even though we are living in difficult times and are surrounded by crises, there is still a fundamental capital of trust.

Ville Pitkänen, Research Director,
E2 Research
[MTV Viiden jälkeen programme, 31 October](#)



Demand for authority: Finns want a strong leader

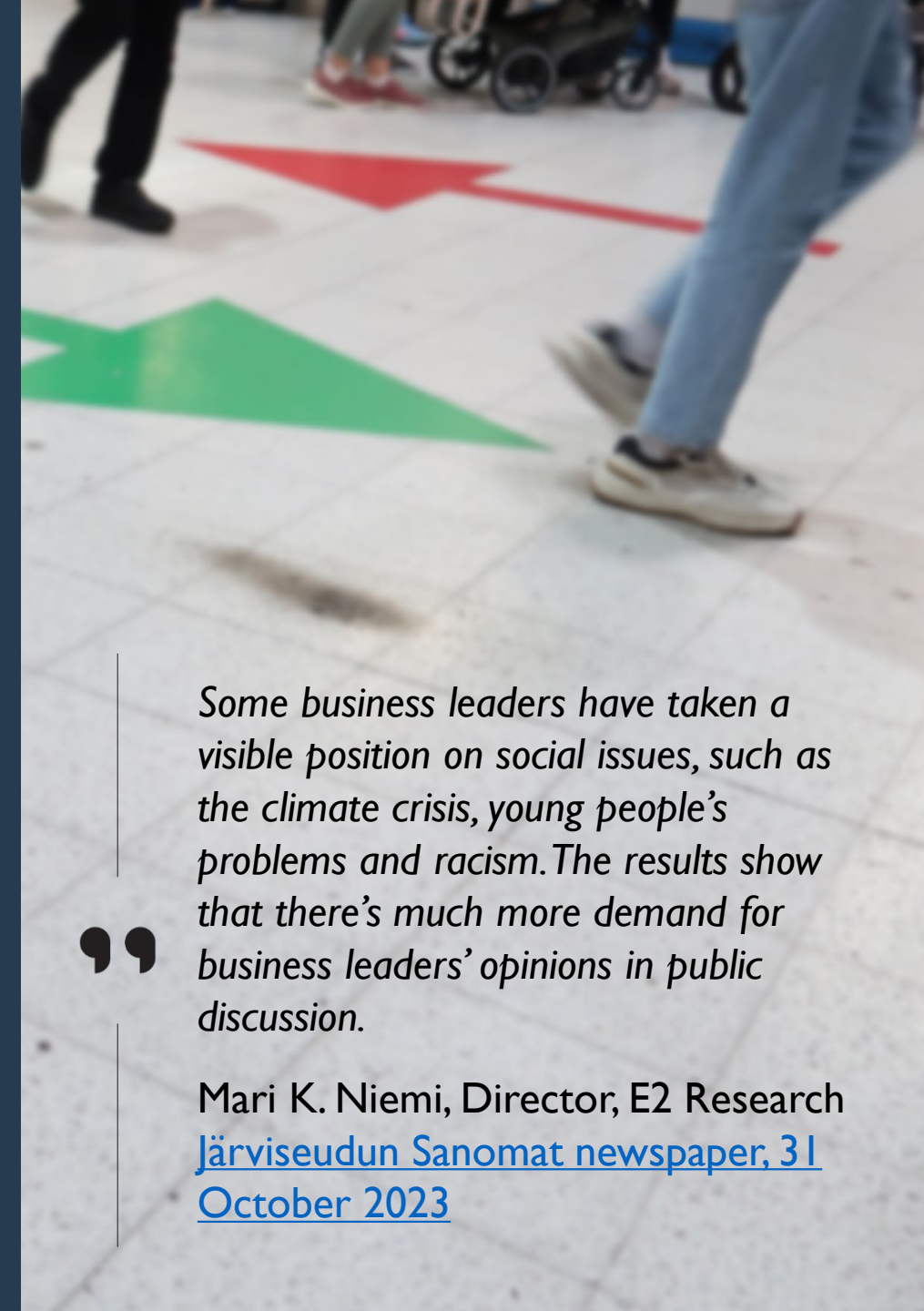
We asked Finns about leadership and leaders' roles. This is topical, as Finland will elect a new president in January–February 2024. The results show that Finns want a strong leader.

Almost four in five (79%) Finns agree somewhat or completely with the statement that “Finland needs a strong leader who will put the country’s affairs in order”.

Both women and men, as well as different age groups, want to see strong leadership. This figure is high for a country with a decades-long history of parliamentary democracy and strong traditions of coalition governments. The political system divides power and authority among several people.

The longing for leadership also extends to business leaders. Many people want business leaders to take a more active stance on social issues: the majority of Finns (58%) would like to see them engage in the public conversation more than they do now.

The approaching presidential election and the grave international climate may have affected people’s mindset and increased their hopes and expectations regarding leadership.



Some business leaders have taken a visible position on social issues, such as the climate crisis, young people’s problems and racism. The results show that there’s much more demand for business leaders’ opinions in public discussion.

Mari K. Niemi, Director, E2 Research
[Järvisseudun Sanomat newspaper, 3 | October 2023](#)



Let's get in touch

We hope you found these results interesting. If you have any questions about our study, we would be happy to tell you more.

At E2 Research, we offer expert services, novel research and analysis that shed light on Finnish society and Finns' thinking.

We also conduct studies on commission that serve the needs of our partners. We have expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. surveys, interviews).

You are warmly welcome to contact us to explore how our skilled team of experts and researchers could benefit your organisation.



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