



# Security and Trust

Spring 2024 National  
Dialogues Summary Report

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**NATIONAL  
DIALOGUES**



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# Summary

The National Dialogues in spring 2024 discussed the experiences of insecurity, security and trust people living in Finland. 111 Dialogues were held across Finland, including 35 Future Dialogues organized jointly by the Prime Minister's Office and the Timeout Foundation as part of preparing the Government Report on the Future. The 1130 participants came from different social groups, cultural backgrounds, and professions. They ranged in age from five-year-olds pre-schoolers to participants in their nineties.

This summary report, based on the records of the dialogues, draws out the "geography of insecurity" that emerges from the discussions. It locates the areas of insecurity experienced by citizens and shows their causes and consequences in the lives of different individuals. Alongside this, it describes the "sources of trust" identified by the participants in the dialogues, that help to strengthen people's trust in their own lives, in their relationships with each other and with society. These two parallel views of our society form an overall picture in which insecurity has clearly increased, but in which the means to build security and trust are still within our reach.

The main conclusions of the Spring 2024 National Dialogues are:

1. The insecurity experienced by citizens has increased. This is reflected in particular as lower confidence in the safety nets of society and in the predictability of their own lives. Increased unpredictability and the perceived erosion of safety nets are narrowing the circle of trust for many people, and putting individuals on an unequal footing in terms of the extent to which support and help is available in their immediate community.
2. Insecurity and the uncertainty is simultaneously shaking up many areas of life: work and livelihoods, welfare and care, social cohesion, the relevance and reliability of information, international relations and, ultimately, the very fabric of life on the planet. Many of the concerning changes seem permanent and it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to believe that things will get better again in the future. Facing an uncertain future becomes even more difficult if people are unable to trust each other and society's ability to cope.
3. In the face of increased insecurity, citizens have solid ideas on how to repair eroding trust while strengthening their sense of security. Trust can be built on many levels: by helping people to take charge of their own capacity to act, by creating community-building encounters, by strengthening citizen participation and better understanding of governance as a basis for decision-making, and by creating positive images of the future. It is important for policy makers and administrations to recognize that citizens' experience of safety and security in society is influenced above all by the concrete conditions of their daily lives, the availability and functioning of public services and the fairness of political decision-making.

# National Dialogues

The National Dialogues have two main objectives:

1. Provide opportunities for citizens to come together and discuss important issues in a constructive and open way.
2. To create, through the experiences of participants, an understanding and up-to-date situational picture of different societal phenomena, challenges and opportunities for the benefit of public administrations and other actors.

In addition, the National Dialogues aim to strengthen social trust, inclusion, and the capacity of different actors to engage in dialogue.

The National Dialogues are based on equal, open and transparent cooperation between public administration and civil society. A *core team* oversees coordinating the dialogues, producing the material provided to the dialogues' organizers, inviting, and briefing the organizers, and producing and publishing a report summarizing the dialogues. The facilitators will be provided with training and support material for organizing and facilitating the dialogue.

*Any actor or any citizen can organize their own National Dialogues.* The aim is to ensure that the voices of as many different groups of people as possible are heard, and that those who are not otherwise heard in the public discussion can also be heard.

Dialogue as a form of communication means an equal discussion based on the experiences of the participants. Dialogue aims to increase understanding of the topic, others, and oneself. Dialogical conversation often has a flexible structure, whereby, through attunement and open discussion, progress is made towards deepening understanding together. It does not seek consensus or solutions. There is room for different perspectives and surprising insights.

Two National Dialogues are organised each year. The choice of topics is guided by four criteria:

1. Finland needs a more diverse understanding of the subject
2. The topic concerns a wide range of citizens at national level
3. The subject matter does not exclude any particular group of people
4. A broader understanding of the subject will also benefit public administrations

Each round of the dialogues a summary report is published, based on the organizers' records of the content of the dialogues. The report will provide an overall view of the topic, based on the experiences of different people and groups of people, and will provide a comprehensive societal picture of the topic.

The summary report will be used for governance and decision-making in the state, municipalities, and wellbeing services counties. Previous dialogue reports have been used, for example, in central government in the preparation of policy measures, such as the development of an open government strategy. The autumn 2023 *Together and Alone* report will be used, for example, in the development of public governance (2024-2025) and in the preparatory work of the Public Governance Group.

It is also hoped that dialogue organizers, participants and other interested parties will use the report in their own work.

# Foreword

National Dialogues have now been held for a year and a half. This is the third summary report, and like its predecessors, *Life in Uncertainty and Together and Alone*, it paints a rich picture of the lives of people living in Finland. Although each round of the National Dialogues highlights different issues, certain themes recur. The insecurity brought about by uncertainty is more and more part of people's everyday lives. Numerous communities are seeking new forms of life amidst digitalization, changes in working life, shrinking public services and the cross-pressures of social turmoil and global crises. Finnish society is undergoing one of the biggest changes in its history, but the future directions are still unclear.

The theme of the Spring 2024 National Dialogue was *Security and Trust*. The participants in the dialogues on this topic highlighted their experience of the erosion of the sense of security and its impact on people's lives. Wars, inflation, government cutbacks, disturbing news from home and abroad, and the ever looming but fast-moving ecological crises in the background undermine the basic trust many people have in life, in their fellow human beings and in society. At the same time, however, there is a desire to believe that there is still room for improvement and a momentum to build trust in each other and in the future. But the common direction is a knife-edge.

We decided to invite citizens to discuss this tension: changes in the sense of security and ways to build trust. More than 1000 people participated in

the dialogues and with their voices we believe that we can offer readers of this report a unique view of Finland in spring 2024. In addition to the content described in this report, it is important to underline that what is special about the National Dialogues is that the information they produce is people's "first-hand experience, in their own words". They provide valuable empirical information about profound changes in our society and thus complement the information provided by other surveys and polls.

However, National Dialogues are not just about the social understanding they produce. They are also about a democratic way of life. The core values of democracy - freedom and equality - are realized in a simple setting: a group of people sitting in a ring talking about issues of common concern. Through the National Dialogues, we succeed in reaching an exceptionally wide range of very different groups and individuals. It also makes many voices that are not usually heard in public discussion heard. Although public officials and decision-makers are closely involved in the National Dialogues, they do not decide what is discussed and how. Instead, officials and decision-makers also enter the dialogue circles as participants. Many of the dialogues conclude by returning to this setting and saying that the dialogues are one of the most important ways in which we can move together towards an uncertain tomorrow.



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# 1. Introduction

The National Dialogues in spring 2024 discussed the experiences of insecurity, security and trust people living in Finland. 111 dialogues were held across Finland, including 35 Future Dialogues organized jointly by the Prime Minister's Office and the Timeout Foundation as part of preparing the Government Report on the Future. The 1130 participants came from different social groups, cultural backgrounds, and professions. They ranged in age from five-year-olds pre-schoolers to participants in their nineties.

The dialogues highlighted the increased experience of insecurity, which has led to a lack of predictability in both one's own life and society. For the participants, insecurity was caused by changes in their own well-being and that of their loved ones, continuity of employment and livelihoods, access to services, and events in the physical and digital environment. Government and media activities and the impact of wars around the world also emerged throughout the discussions. The dialogues suggest that citizens' experience of security and insecurity is influenced above all by everyday conditions, the experience of access to and functioning of public services, and the fairness of society and decision-making.

The data from the National Dialogues support the trends identified in other studies and surveys. While the latest Citizen Pulse survey in June 2024<sup>1</sup> showed a slight improvement in public confidence, the Citizen Pulse surveys of autumn 2023<sup>2</sup> and spring 2024<sup>3</sup> conducted just before and during the National Dialogues showed that citizens' experience of social justice had fallen to its lowest level since the spring of 2020. Concerns about economic well-being had increased and confidence in health care had fallen.

The Ministry of the Interior's monitoring of the development of the feeling of security (2023)<sup>4</sup> also shows that the feeling of security of Finns has clearly deteriorated. The survey revealed regional and age group differences in the perception of security: in rural local centers, the feeling of security is weaker than in cities, and in the under-40 age group it is weaker than in older age groups. 65% of participants are concerned about their livelihood and financial security. 93% of participants also say they are worried about the direction the world is taking.



However, the recent OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024)<sup>5</sup> still shows Finland as a high confidence society by international standards. However, even in Finland, trust in governance has clearly declined, with concerns particularly about rising prices and the state of health-care.

The data from the National Dialogues, based on the experiences of 1130 people, is a unique source of empirical information that can complement and deepen the trends identified in the surveys. The dialogues generate experiential knowledge from encounters between people in different life situations and socio-economic positions. They help to understand how insecurity, security and trust are concretely constructed in people's everyday lives and what differences there are in these experiences in the lives of people of different ages, living in different parts of Finland and in different life situ-

ations. At the same time, the dialogues shed light on the issues that affect the sense of security and trust in our society more broadly.

This report, based on the records of the dialogues, draws out the "geography of insecurity" that emerged from the discussions. It locates the areas of insecurity experienced by citizens and shows their causes and consequences in the lives of different individuals. Alongside this, it describes the "sources of trust" identified by the participants in the dialogues, which help to strengthen people's trust in their own lives, in their relationship with each other and with society. These two parallel views of our society form an overall picture in which insecurity clearly seems to be on the rise, but in which the means to build security and trust are still within our reach.

<sup>1</sup> <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/kansalaispulssi-kansalaisten-mielialat-ja-luottamus-yhteiskuntaan-ovat-vahvistuneet-selvasti>

<sup>2</sup> [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/kansalaispulssi-kokemus-yhteiskunnan-oikeydenmukaisuudesta-ja-luottamus-useisiin-instituutioihin-heikentynt?languageld=en\\_US](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/kansalaispulssi-kokemus-yhteiskunnan-oikeydenmukaisuudesta-ja-luottamus-useisiin-instituutioihin-heikentynt?languageld=en_US)

<sup>3</sup> [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/kansalaispulssi-luottamus-terveydenhuoltoon-ja-koulutukseen-yha-laskussa?languageld=en\\_US](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/kansalaispulssi-luottamus-terveydenhuoltoon-ja-koulutukseen-yha-laskussa?languageld=en_US)

<sup>4</sup> <https://intermin.fi/-/suomalaisten-turvallisuuden-tunne-on-heikentynt-viime-vuodesta>

<https://intermin.fi/documents/1410869/4024872/Sentimentti-tiivistelma-tutkimustuloksista-lokakuu2023.pdf/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/trust-in-government.html>

[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes\\_a8004759-en/finland\\_596ba5da-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_a8004759-en/finland_596ba5da-en.html)

## 2. Information on the Discussions

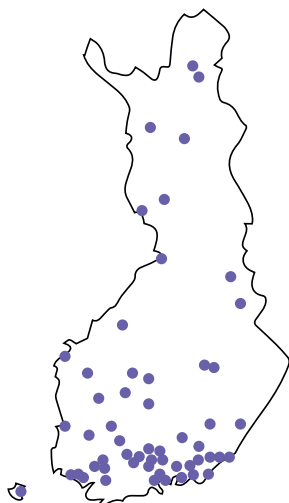
The information includes the Future Dialogues

# 111

dialogues

# 1130

participants



Age range of participants:

# 5–90 years

Languages:

# 5

languages

English, Finnish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish



### Locations of the dialogues:

dialogues were held all over Finland and online as remote dialogues in the following villages, municipalities, and cities, among others:

Espoo, Forssa, Hausjärvi, Helsinki, Hyvinkää, Hämeenlinna, Inari, Ivalo, Janakkala, Joutseno, Jyväskylä, Järvenpää, Kaarina, Kainuu, Kannonkoski, Kemi, Keuruu, Kittilä, Kouvola, Kotka, Kuhmo, Kuopio, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Loppi, Loviisa, Mariehamn, Mikkeli, Naantali, Nurmijärvi, Oulu, Pori, Pornainen, Porvoo, Rovaniemi, Salo, Sastamala, Savonlinna, Seinäjoki, Siilinjärvi, Sodankylä, Somero, Tammela, Tampere, Turku, Tuusula, Vaasa, Valkeakoski, Vantaa, Vihti, Virolahti, Virrat, Vuohijärvi, Ylivieska, Äänekoski.

Participants from Belgium, Lebanon, Germany and Taiwan also took part in the discussions.

### The participants included:

children, young people, schoolchildren, students, parents, local citizens, professionals from different fields such as teachers, youth workers, social and health professionals, cultural professionals, state and municipal officials, police officers, researchers, artists, entrepreneurs, workers in civil society organizations, migrants, activists, people with disabilities, experts by experience, peer and volunteer workers, people with criminal and substance abuse problems, policy makers, pensioners and managers.

### The dialogues were organised by:

#### CSOs and associations:

Kalliola Settlement, Kalliola Settlement / Aurala Settlement, Citizen Forum / Towards the Future Project, The Lifelong Learning Foundation sr., Kare ry, Central Uusimaa Peer and Expert by Experience Support Network Association Werkko ry, Kynnys ry, The Martha Association, Mental Health Finland

/ Rovaniemi Region Mental Health Association, Naistenkartano, Sivas Study Centre, Save the Children Finland, Pesäpuu ry, Rovaniemi Pensioners Association y, Sillat ry, Sivistysliitto/ Citizens' Forum Study Centre and The Finnish Youth Association, Suomen Operaatio Libero ry, The Finnish Refugee Council, Vanhus- ja lähimmäispalvelun liitto Valli ry, The Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older Adults, Vuohijärvi Village Association

**Central government, municipalities and cities:**

Espoo City Library, Forssa City Library, the city of Forssa, the city of Jyväskylä, the city of Jyväskylä / osallisuuspalvelut, the city of Järvenpää, the municipality of Kannonkoski, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Keuruu City Library, Ministry of Education and Culture and Arts Promotion Centre Finland, Porvoo City Library, Participation Services of the city Rovaniemi, Participation Services of the city Rovaniemi and Erityislasten omaiset ELO ry, the city of Rovaniemi / Participation Centre Oodi, Tammela Municipal Library, Arts Promotion Centre Finland /Globe Art Point, the municipality of Tuusula, Ministry of Finance / Open Democracy Network, Ministry of Finance / Public Sector Innovation network, Ministry of Finance / LIMinal National Dialogues, Ministry of Finance, network consultant training in Rovaniemi

**Foundations, institutes and educational organisations:**

Deaconess Foundation/ D- Stations, Timeout Foundation, Timeout Foundation & Puistokatu 4, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Postal Museum, Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, Tukena Foundation

**Companies and individuals:**

Aretai Oy/DialogiAkademia, Henna Hertsi, Intonaattorit Oy, Kohtaava dialogi (2 dialogues), Matilda Holkkola ja Annina Myllyaho, Roboline Group Oy, Valtaamo Oy

**Future Dialogues:**

The report also draws on the records of 35 Future Dialogues organized jointly by the Timeout Foun-

ation and the Prime Minister's Office, as part of preparing the Government Report on the Future, from which we have extracted content related to security and trust. Nearly 300 individuals from over 50 different locations and three different countries participated in the Future Dialogues. Three of the Future Dialogues were conducted in Swedish.

The Future Dialogues were conducted in collaboration with various stakeholders. These included: Aivovammaliitto, FinFami ry, Finnsight-event, Finnish Pensioners' Federation, High Schools of Hausjärvi, Janakkala and Lope, City of Hämeenlinna, Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, Regional Council of Kainuu, City of Kotka, City of Kuopio Participation Team, Kölvi, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, Nätverket Bärkraft, Service House Saga Kaskenpuisto, Puistokatu 4, Finnish Reservists' Association, Smile Project, Finnish Roma Association, Finland Society, Suopelto School, Municipality of Tuusula, Vantaa Yhteinen pöytä food terminal, Yhdessä osallistuen Project / Mikkelin, Youth Future Summit.

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Dialogue transcriptions range from verbatim transcriptions to summaries with bullet points. The quotations used in this report are direct quotations from the dialogue transcripts, with the use of filler words removed in places for readability and abbreviated where necessary. We have read the material closely and analyzed it thematically, paying attention first to the themes that emerged in the individual dialogues and to the development of understanding during the discussion. We have then extended the analysis to a larger dialogue of the whole material, where the individual dialogues, with their different perspectives, form part of the overall picture.

# The Geography of Insecurity

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## 3. The Geography of Insecurity

**"It seems that insecurities are flooding in."**

Through the experiences of the 1130 people who participated in the dialogues, we draw a picture of the "geography of insecurity" in the lives of people living in Finland. This map covers homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces and wider society from public services to decision-making. The map also includes the media and the digital world, and extends beyond the borders of Finland and, ultimately, to the entire planet. What is common to the different levels of the map is the experience of people who feel that their lives have become more insecure.



## Homes

Many participants feel that their home is the safest place to be, but at the same time, insecurity is knocking on more and more people's doors. Participants in the dialogues felt that many insecurities are reflected outside their homes, such as unrest in the neighborhood, disturbing news from the media, the dangers of the internet, political decisions that undermine their basic security, increasing difficulties in accessing necessary public services and the emotional climate of an increasingly polarized social climate.

One of the most significant issues affecting homes was increased concern about their own and their loved ones' financial situation. Increasing financial worries and poverty in families with children were perceived by participants as undermining both children's and adults' experience of security. Discussions focused on how loved ones cope financially, how families with children cope with large mortgages and how students cope with dwindling support. Fluctuating electricity prices, rising food prices, rising interest costs and politicians' talk of cutting subsidies and pensions have made participants wary. One of them describes how five years ago he had little need to worry about his own or his family's financial survival, whereas today such fears are justified.

Discussants stress the importance of every child growing up feeling loved and cared for. This care often manifests itself in very concrete everyday things. The youngest participants - children aged five - said that they feel safe going to bed when the bedroom door is open, parents' voices can be heard in their room and the night light is on. Adults, on the other hand, hope that children's experiences of insecurity will be taken seriously and that their fears and feelings will be taken into account, even

if, from an adult's point of view, there is nothing threatening about a dark room, for example.

For some of the participants, insecurity is an ingrained feeling that can also be experienced within the walls of one's own home. Such basic insecurity has deep roots, dating back to early childhood. As a result, people have very different starting points in life depending on their childhood and adolescent experiences. Those who have grown up in secure homes tend to have more confidence in life and in other people than those whose childhoods were dominated by fear and insecurity.

The dialogues included participants who talked about childhoods that included adult substance abuse, being belittled and called names, rejection and violence. For some, the insecurity of a childhood home had been replaced by foster care provided by society, but even this does not provide the security and caring attention that children need.

*I have had a challenging childhood, and a lot of insecurity has remained. If you have experienced belittlement and rejection from parents as a child, my own experience is that it leaves a permanent mark.*

Positive experiences of acceptance and security in later life have helped build confidence in your life and future, but difficult life events leave their mark. If the experience of insecurity has become part of one's inner self, feelings of insecurity may rear their heads at different stages and in different situations in life. Some participants have made a conscious effort to create predictability and confidence in their own lives in relationships and at work, for example. They also want to help and support others:

*I didn't have any dream because I didn't think I'd be alive long enough to dream about anything and it was many years of that. But nowadays my dream is that I save the world.*

Professionals working with children and young people who have participated in the dialogues also face challenging situations where they think that vulnerability and insecurity are behind the child's threatening behavior. It is therefore felt important that in public services, too, it should be possible for children to form a secure relationship with a professional who stays around for a long time rather than with changing workers. It is also believed that supporting parents' well-being and livelihoods will always strengthen children's well-being. A sense of security



*is very much born out of the confidence that there are people who take care of me, or there is a system that supports me when I'm having a hard time myself.*





*It's important to keep yards in good condition, to make them pleasant, so that people spend time in the yard and get to know each other, rather than going to one park after another.*

Discussants have noted that there are many regional differences in the safety of the local environment. This is also affected by cuts in public services. When people in difficult life situations do not get the help they need, the consequences are felt in the neighborhood.

*(...) Lack of money, lack of mental health services and a small support network can be reflected in areas and in the way, people look and behave.*

## Local area

Several of the dialogues highlighted factors of insecurity in the residential environment. These were perceived to vary widely, both regionally but also depending on the age, gender, ethnicity, and life situation of the individual.

Particularly the things that happen close to home make people feel unsafe: bikes are stolen from the yard, communal areas are messed up, windows are broken, and substance abuse happening on the yard. Some of the discussions reflect on how the lack of community in the neighborhood also undermines the safety of the neighborhood. Not knowing your neighbors makes it harder to trust them. Building neighborhood safety starts with taking care of the shared physical environment and getting to know your neighbors, even if only superficially. For families, it would be important to have familiar adults in the neighborhood to look out for children.

The perception of safety in one's immediate environment is always to some extent relative and depends on one's life situation and past experiences. Older participants are frightened by unpredictable pedal cyclists and mobile phone users who ignore other traffic while driving, and young people on mopeds and ATVs while on foot. Young electronic scooter riders, on the other hand, perceive car traffic as dangerous because they are easily caught in the middle of larger vehicles. People moving to Helsinki from smaller towns wonder whether they dare to live on the first floor in Helsinki, while people who have moved here from other parts of the world praise the fact that they can send their children to school alone and walk in peace at night. A self-identified six-foot white man, on the other hand, thinks that women or members of minorities may not feel as safe as he does to walk the streets at night.



Individual public events can also affect how safe you feel in your neighborhood. The murder of a young girl in Valkeakoski at the time of the dialogues had led several participants to reflect on their own safety or that of girls and women in their neighborhood when out and about.

In some areas, young people behaving without limits are seen as a threat that should be tackled. The presence of police and guards can both increase and decrease the sense of security: the preventive effect is praised, but there is also a desire to address the root causes of problems.

*It would be safer if there were more police patrols in my area, at least in the evening. However, it would be best if young people had something meaningful to do, so that they didn't have to go out on the streets to riot and rob. Funds should be provided to prevent the marginalization of young people. Now it seems that this is more of a cutback than anything else.*

The increase in insecurity has also started to be reflected in business. Some participants have come across door-to-door companies selling security equipment and security services. This makes one wonder whether security can be bought. Security locks, door locks and alarms may increase the sense of security, but does it really lead to increased security?

*Someone rings the doorbell and comes to ask what is most important in your everyday life, is it the safety of your children? That security can also be commercialized and sold, but does it increase the sense of security?*



## Digital environment

**"The world is based on the use of information systems, but if insecurity spreads to the network and systems, it is challenging. We are quite insecure in the situation where some crucial system fails."**

Regardless of age participants in the National Dialogues are concerned about risks related to the digital environment, online transactions, and national cybersecurity. In addition, there is a lot of inaccurate and false information circulating online, which can cause a lot of damage. The culture of social media discourse also seems unsafe to many.

The large-scale data breaches at Vastaamo and the City of Helsinki, as well as the City of Helsinki's wage payment issues, have led many to ques-

tion the security of digital data assets. It is not only criminal actors who are seen as a threat. The activities of large companies such as Google (Alphabet) and Facebook (Meta) are also suspect:

*On YouTube you have to take a selfie or send a picture of your driving licence or something like that, but I don't want to give my data to Google because of data breaches, because even a teenager can hack into Google's website. As far as security is concerned, I have zero trust in big companies that make money by aggregating my data.*

Strong user authentication for various digital services is considered important. At the same time, some people are concerned about the need to use their bank IDs for non-banking purposes.

*Online scammers are very skilled. They are very clever at spoofing bank authentication pages, and it is very easy to get hurt.*

It is clear from the dialogues that the challenges of using online services are particularly felt by older participants:

*If I go to a tax office website, for example, I don't dare go there because I don't know what I'm doing and then I'm stuck there. It's so uncertain, it's like one crosses two. Then I get bored, and I say let's call it a day.*

Children and grandchildren often come to the rescue, setting up devices, helping with searches, showing which app to use for what, and advising on how to use passwords. Others need a service point where they can get help with online tax services and other administrative matters. The participant, who works as a digital guide, says that when they come to the helpdesk, *'Facebook and other things are all messed up and they hate it more than anything else when you don't know how to set up the settings'*. Personalized guidance can create an experience of trust, but it is also the responsibility of service providers to take better account of accessibility: *'we are not all as fast and smart and visible'*.

In the digital environment, the line between right and wrong information also seems to be blurred. For example, many people have come across suspicious videos where *'some tweeter with no experience in the field may be spreading the word'*. Several discussions asked what can be trusted anymore, and how to check the credibility and reliability of a single piece of news or source of information. The reverse concern was that even reliable content is being treated with skepticism for fear of being hoaxed.

Many dialogues raised concerns about the safety of children in a world of smartphones, internet, and social media applications. In many cases, there are

huge differences in digital usage and digital skills between children and adults. This makes it difficult for parents to understand what their children are facing in the digital environment. Predators who abuse children have also moved onto online platforms, making it difficult for parents to keep up. Platform responsibility is being called for because, while parents have a responsibility to know what their children are doing on social media, they cannot simply check their child's phone because of the confidentiality of their messages.

*Because of rapid technological developments, children today may have better skills than their parents did. Therefore, the creators of social media platforms have a responsibility.*

The digital environment continues to change at a rapid pace. The participants point out that all age groups are more enthusiastic and more reluctant digital users, while young people can also be troubled by the fear of being left behind. This fear is exacerbated by the rapid development of artificial intelligence. How can we identify human-generated content from AI-generated content? What can we trust and what kind of insecurity is created by fake news? How are we guided by algorithms? As a society, can we anticipate and prepare for the challenges this poses? Will AI endanger my profession and my livelihood?

## Schools

School safety was discussed from the perspectives of both children and young people and adults. Insecurity was raised by large school and class sizes, lack of adults in the school, poor language skills, students who are unwell and vandalism. The school shooting in Vantaa in the spring shocked many participants and prompted them to reflect on

*Can this happen to us? The children have also asked their parents about it, and they themselves have said that they are worried and scared.*

School bullying is a particular concern for both children and adults. Young people who have experienced bullying themselves have had two experiences: for some, bullying has been addressed and trust has been built together. Others, on the other hand, feel that there is a lack of interest and resources to intervene and that no amount of "disciplinary action" seems to work on the bullies. A parent of a child who had been bullied describes how the child no longer wanted to go to school and therefore moved to study at home. Going to school can also be frightening in a situation where the child has moved to Finland from another country, has no language skills yet and everything is new, different, and scary.

Some participants think that the effects of the pandemic on the deterioration of the school community are reflected in an increase in bullying.

*Bullying is always a problem. After Covid, there is a lack of community. Not having a group around you can lead to bullying.*

Adults are also concerned about whether there are enough safe adults in schools, whether one teacher or school counselor has too many children in their charge, and whether there is time to listen to and address children's concerns at school. Some participants were also concerned about the closure of small schools and the move to larger school centers, and the challenges of inclusion in schools of all sizes:

*It would have been better not to have gone down the road of inclusion. There is no calm in the classrooms for children now.*

A safe school is the result of collaboration: students, parents, teachers, and other school professionals are all involved in the day-to-day running of the school. More broadly, the whole of society is responsible, as the events and atmosphere of the society are always reflected in schools and their safety.



## Workplaces

In workplaces, feelings of insecurity are related to the workplace atmosphere and the physical working environment with its risks. Other issues discussed included continuity and stability of employment, changing organizational structures and the uncertainty they bring, financial and cutback pressures, loss of trust in colleagues and management, and feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability.

Discussants working as freelancers, grant holders and entrepreneurs are used to the intermittent nature of work and poor social protection, but these times also highlight these "familiar" uncertainties. Artists who have migrated to Finland from abroad experienced a particular sense of insecurity, as the insecurity of their profession is compounded by tightening immigration policies. Even workplaces traditionally considered stable have recently faced uncertainty due to funding and cutback pressures, which in some places have eroded working conditions.

*The ring-fenced austerity decisions that are now being planned; they are really hitting hard. And our staff's sense of basic security about the future, about pay, about the value of civil servants (...) People no longer feel that it is safe to work for the state, that it is stable.*

The dialogues had many participants from public sector and public service workers, who talked about the changes they face in their work. For example, the social workers who took part in the discussions have faced constantly changing structures and teams in their working environment. This makes them ponder how to provide safe and trusting encounters for clients if they do not feel trusted in their own working environment:

*If your colleagues change or you have a bit of variability or clients change all the time, then creating a safe relationship (...) is not necessarily simple and easy and it is certainly reflected directly in the encounters and the relationship you can create with children, young people, parents, and foster families.*

In the presence of a constant professional fear that something bad will happen, decisions are easily made to counteract this fear. In one discussion, making a mistake, such as a wrong child protection placement or discharge decision, and being held accountable for it was defined as a "day fear". "Night fear", on the other hand, is a more wholehearted fear of it,

*that I'm going to get hurt, that I'm going to turn out to be a bad and unworthy employee.*

The possibility of discussing fears openly and collectively in work communities helps to alleviate such uncertainty. Also, professionals experience insecurity, vulnerability, and inadequacy in their work, and no one can cope with this insecurity alone:

*At what point has child protection or social work become an individual discipline? When I think that it is an institution where we should collectively take a stand, so that this is not an individual sport and the life of these children is now on my shoulders and in my hands and power, but it should be collective, and they should have broader shoulders.*

## Media

Several dialogues addressed the role of the media as a source of insecurity. There was broad agreement that the current state of the media is undermining people's sense of security through 'scared, scared, scared' news coverage'. The news often seems to focus on bad and negative events, making it 'difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel as the cycle of bad news continues'.

As a result, many people have chosen to follow less news media to protect themselves from the constant barrage of negative emotions. Constant negative news is also believed to create a climate that erodes public trust, as it erodes people's faith in the benevolence of others. Following the news on the internet and the anger and deliberate confrontation generated in comment threads caused fear among many participants. As a reaction, one of the participants describes having built his own social media bubble, where risky topics do not pass through.

Although Finland is a very peaceful country by international standards and, for example, the crime rate has been falling for a long time, many citizens feel the opposite. Part of the reason for this is thought to be the threatening images and attitudinal language deliberately created by the media:

*If you already use provocative language like "shock thunderstorm" in weather reports, it will catch on, spreading hysteria, even though thunderstorms have been around as long as there has been life on Earth.*

The speed of social media as a news channel is also a two-way street. People want to be informed quickly about important issues, but rumors also spread on social media, as the Vantaa school shooting case showed:

*Our 12-year-old knew the name of the shooter and I was just waiting to hear what had happened.*

Discussants are concerned about children who may see raw news footage on social media, while 'we adults see it as a stylized version of the news'. For adults too, the constant 'doomscrolling' creates anxiety and insecurity, as many experienced both when the covid pandemic spread and when the war of aggression against Ukraine began. Some discussants reflect that the situation would feel more manageable in terms of feelings of insecurity if news were 'dispensed' only once a day in newspapers and on television news, as in the past. In-depth information also requires reflecting and structuring, which the constant stream of news does not allow.

Participants hope that the news and other media should not only focus on conflicts and disputes, but also on things that unite people, discuss values, showcase trailblazers, and create hope. One participant gives an example from Scotland:

*When I watch the news there, there's always something nice in the news: someone has restored a forest or something like that, there's a good buzz. (...) I miss something like that in our evening news too. There is very little positive stuff on the news.*



## Public services

**"It feels like we are no longer being taken care of, but the welfare state is collapsing."**

The perceived erosion of the Finnish welfare state emerged as a particularly major cause of concern and insecurity in the national dialogues. One of the main topics of discussion was precisely the changes brought about by the reform of the welfare regions. Especially in remote areas, help is becoming increasingly distant as services are centralized in provincial centers. Even in towns and cities, people feel that public health and social services are nowadays difficult to access.

Many people have found it difficult to even get an appointment with a doctor, thousands of people are on the waiting list for dental care, the criteria for access to treatment and help are getting tighter, referrals for further treatment are being held back and the night-time service in their area is being shut down. Elderly people in need of support are struggling to cope on their own or with an elderly carer at home, families with special needs children are battling with the service system and carers are burdened when support services are unavailable. People with mental health or substance abuse problems find it difficult to get help on the somatic side, and digital services are offered even to those who would like to see a professional face to face. There is no service guidance, there is a lot of staff turnover, and staff and skills shortages affect safety.

*I am worried about whether in the future we will be able to get treatment quickly from the public sector or whether we will have to queue for a long time. Even now there are often long queues. Yes, this does cause insecurity.*

Overall, participants feel that *'trust in society is about predictability and taking care of everyone'*. The current government's cuts to public services and third sector organizations are breaking this trust in the minds of many. The erosion of trust in turn leads to a high level of insecurity: will I still be able to get help and care? What will happen to my loved ones in need?

The unpredictability and fragmentation of decision-making is something that disabled people who participated in the dialogues have been familiar with for a long time:

*For example, the Disability Services Act, which is approved by one parliament and postponed by another. The next government will have a different composition. You can no longer rely on continuity and parliamentary accountability.*

The "disabled people always complain" attitude feels annoying, because it is about statutory services and equal opportunities. From a safety perspective, accessibility, and services for people with disabilities play a key role. To strengthen the safety of people with disabilities, participants argue that public authorities also need more skills in identifying violence and sexual violence, in considering people with disabilities in emergency services, and in adapting safety instructions for people who cannot speak or move independently.

As society's safety net weakens, it is seen that people's circle of trust in their own safety nets, which not everyone has, narrows.

*The loneliness that comes with ageing brings a sense of insecurity; it feels like a threat: can you get help at home if you need it? Is there someone to pick you up if you fall?*

According to the participants, society is becoming increasingly class-based, ignoring the poor and the low-income. Social classes are becoming more segregated, and it is the already disadvantaged who are hit hardest by cuts. While many people are aware that there is not enough money in the state to cover everything, it is feared that the erosion of care will be met with a loss of confidence and, in the worst case, a breakdown in social cohesion:

*I think that we can no longer maintain the kind of society we have now. There are fewer of us being born and there are more and more older people. We can no longer rely on a welfare society. This also leads to distrust. We lose mutual trust when things start to escalate.*

Dwindling trust in the service system means that even those for whom services have worked well or who do not need them at the moment are concerned:

*My own fears are actually not based on my own experiences. I am healthy and have not needed services, and when my child has been seriously ill, they have been well looked after, but more on this societal mood and the narrative of constant misery that makes you think that nothing works anymore.*





## Decision-making and social climate

**"It seems that there are few things you can trust in modern times besides your loved ones, and all the time the things you can trust are narrowing. "**

Alongside the erosion of the welfare state, the culture of decision-making is a source of insecurity for the participants. Many feel that citizens are not listened to in decision-making at local, regional, and national level, that people of different ages are not taken into account, that the countryside or its inhabitants are not valued, that the capacity of civil society organizations is undermined and that politicians do not stand by their promises.

*I am on the Youth Council of the welfare region myself. I notice, especially in the politics of the welfare region, how many politicians are alienated from the everyday life of the norm.*

Some still have confidence in the authorities, but no longer in political decision-makers. An important reason cited for this distrust is the increased tendency of decision-makers to ignore or distort expert information to increase their own power. Others are concerned about the broader picture: what will happen to the traditionally strong trust in democracy in Finland?

As an isolated but powerful event affecting people's experience of security, the dialogues highlighted a member of parliament who used a gun in the street, which

*brought it down to a personal level (...) Even at work, there are people who do not follow previously agreed practices. Nothing you are used to relying on is really valid anymore.*

Confidence in society is also undermined by the racism that participants have encountered on the streets, in schools and in the workplace.

*It is never safe to treat people unequally and to incite hatred against different ethnic groups. It creates confrontation and violence on both sides. Unfortunately, we also have politicians who are inciting racism, even if they ostensibly say they are against it.*

A participant who has moved to Finland from another country says their experience of Finland has changed with the current government. Before, they felt belonging here, but the government has made them feel like an outsider. Another participant fears that 'foreigners will be kicked out'. Immigrant, immigrant background, new Finn and native Finn are all terms used to construct exclusionary identities.

As well as language, racism also manifests itself through 'subtle behavior, assuming that because of one's background, a person lacks ability to do something'. Finns seem to know the right way to live and sometimes arrogantly advise this, as if a certain kind of narrowly defined Finnishness is everyone's goal.

Those who speak Finnish as their mother tongue usually do not realize that language can also be a security issue. One of the participants says that she speaks to her child in a very low voice on the bus so as not to reveal that they are immigrants. Another describes how

*It was not so much discrimination or direct violence, but more of a feeling, an atmosphere. Because I was not integrated, I could not speak another language and I limited communication in my mother tongue to a minimum so as not to cause conflict.*

In particular, the Russian language has become, in the words of the participants, "a hostage of the political situation", with the result that Russian-speaking participants are subjected to prejudice and hatred:

*I first experienced it with my daughter at a local clinic. My daughter and I were speaking Russian, and people moved three steps away. I had never felt anything like it in my life.*

At the same time, the dialogues remind us that there is little corruption in Finland, everyone who goes to the voting booth can trust that their vote will go to their candidate, people dare to express their opinions and demonstrate their views, and there are more and more channels for direct influence. But it would be fatal for trust to drift so far apart that we could no longer identify with each other's different situations and ways of thinking. Public discussion involves different interests and the conflicts that arise from them, 'but it is one thing to start stigmatizing other people and groups of people'. Some dialogues called for a clear ban on hate speech and even a specific campaign to reduce confrontation and build trust. Responsibility is expected from decision-makers, who play a visible role and thus set an example for others:

*Politicians should lead by example, not grinning in the A-studio and being inappropriate in the parliament chamber.*



## Wars in the world

### "I wonder if the boys will have to go to war?"

The dialogues also addressed national security and global threats. The ongoing wars in Europe and elsewhere in the world have led many participants to reassess their perception of world security. The belief that good will develop and grow in the world has been severely shaken by the wars. War is also becoming a reality for younger generations, for whom it has hitherto seemed a distant and alien idea.

*He was six years old at the time, and we were reading a book together about the war, and then I realized (...) that he didn't know a word like that, and I had to open it and tell him what it was. And I was glad that he had grown up to be six years old and didn't need such a word in his life. And then that morning, Feb. 24, I realized that from now on, all children will know the word war as one of the first words because of its presence.*

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its hostile actions against Finland and other countries raised concerns and fears. People ponder how border control in Finland is managed and whether our security of supply is in order. Some have sought out the location of the shelter and bought iodine tablets, checked that passports are valid and arranged a meeting place with loved ones in case something terrible happens and communication is lost. At worst, there are even fears of a third world war and the destruction of the world in a battle between the superpowers. These are all things that few people have ever had to think about before, or, after the Cold War era, would ever have imagined having to think about again.

*I don't think very many people seriously thought about such things twenty years ago. Or that the main topic of the Finnish presidential elections would have been iron on the border and closing the borders and how to arm and fortify the North.*

Finland's recent membership of NATO is almost unanimously seen in the dialogues as a source of security, as it will make it 'less easy to invade us than before'. Membership of the military alliance, however, arouses mixed feelings:

*It was shocking, I had been under the illusion that there was peace in Europe. Now this is personal, I am anti-military, but it was now clear without a doubt that we were going to join the Western military alliance. I had to accept it through gritted teeth, but you have to do what you can. But it did not increase security.*

Insecurity is also created by the international community's inability to intervene in the wars in both Ukraine and Gaza. While there is a desire to continue to support Ukraine, and 'security and confidence are affected by the fact that support is not slackened', the stealthy militarization of society is also a cause for concern:

*It seems that in a situation like this, where Russia is waging a war of aggression, the strengths of our own society are being forgotten. You start to think like totalitarian states, and you respond with the means they use.*

Fears from history are also activated in everyday life and in people's minds:

*When I myself have got the idea in my mother's milk that you should never trust a Russian (...) it's a kind of cultural heritage that comes from there, that the Russian always comes from across the border, it has always come.*

Participants have found that war brings to the surface a deep threat that invites political discourse that 'constantly seeks to apportion blame and to define the outer limits of the group'. In this moment, the Russians are labelled as the culprits, a fact that the participants in the National Dialogues with a Russian background or who speak Russian have felt in many ways:

*Pretty much my first reaction was that I'm probably going to be blamed for this. I had already been living in Finland for 20 years, and I was like, that's where everything went, that's where I learned the language and am integrated, and I thought, now it's all going out the window.*

One participant sums it up: 'it felt like all the opportunities were taken away'. Participants with a Russian background and Russian speakers have had to ask themselves whether they should be ashamed of their Russianness. Is it still possible to practice one's profession or to make art in public? And how do Russian-speaking children and young people construct their identity and how can they talk about war in a safe way? Is it possible to distinguish between acting against Putin and the Russian regime and acting against the Russian people?

The dialogues also included people who have first-hand experience of the wars fought in Finland, of being evacuated and of the post-war period and its consequences:

*I was a child of war, six years old, when the war broke out. I was close to the war. This has been very much on my mind. There was a winter frost and lots of snow. The bomb squadron came unannounced. The alarms didn't work. They just bombed. I had to go home and shut the door and hope that heaven would save us. 12 firebombs exploded all around and from the window you could see the neighbor's house blow up.*

Another participant, who fled to a bomb shelter with her mother and sister, thinks that today war is 'an awful lot scarier with nuclear weapons and everything'. Discussants of different ages are worried about bombs falling, 'our boys' going to war, being a cannon fodder for NATO membership, and minorities being left behind in a crisis.

The Finnish-born participant, who lives on the eastern border, says that relations and trade have always been good on the border, and in the future these bridges will have to be rebuilt. What seems even more crazy to one of the participants is that right now funding for peace organizations is being cut off. There are many others who hope that we will not be exhausted by all the gloom, that the future will be carried forward with hope and that the younger generations will find lasting peace.

## The Planet

**"I can understand people who can close their eyes to everything and live their lives. I studied to be a climate expert, and I looked at the different scenarios where there are these probable global temperatures in 2100, and it's really scary, but it's also really far away."**

In the National Dialogues, concerns about biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental pollution did not feature prominently. We believe this can be explained by the fact that experiences of security and insecurity are strongly linked to people's immediate daily lives. Safety or insecurity in one's own neighborhood, workplace or local services is a tangible presence in everyday life in the here and now. They can also be influenced to some extent. Climate change and biodiversity loss, on the other hand, have not yet become a concrete reality in the everyday lives of all Finns, and the threats associated with them are not as tangible as drug needles in a local park, government cuts or the closure of the health center emergency service in one's own area.

*Finns believe that preserving the welfare society is more important than the environmental crisis. That's only natural when you look at the world situation, rising prices, long queues for health care and so on. Concrete things affect lives. Then you might be less concerned about more abstract threats, like the environmental crisis.*

One discussant said it is a generational issue: older people have lived through recessions and the Cold War and are used to being afraid of different things. At the same time, when there is a war going on in Europe, there is simply not enough space for environmental issues in people's minds and in public discussion:

*War issues move faster and are more concrete, but climate issues are slower. A lot of people think, well, there's no climate change when it's been such a cold winter.*

The participants also perceive the work of the government as *'leaving aside bills and projects related to the environment and biodiversity loss'*. It is typical of the discussants that we are happy to talk about sustainability even if we do not make consumption choices that support it, that we praise Finns' relationship with nature even if we exploit it without any concern for the future, and that we travel without worrying about tomorrow. Some predict that times may yet get worse as the climate gets hotter, which is why we need all the means at our disposal, both in Finland and abroad.

*This is an issue for all peoples and countries. Climate emergency is a big problem and question and a dark cloud in the sky when you think about Finland's future.*

# Sources of Trust

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## 4. Sources of Trust

As experiences of insecurity add to the uncertainty of life and blur the outlook for the future, discussants also identify several sources of trust. At an individual level, participants build a feeling of trust in their lives by taking care of their own functional ability and social relationships. In communities, trust is built through encounters, participation and belonging. For many participants, trust at society level comes from openly functioning governance and perceived fairness in decision-making.

### Physical and mental fitness

**"Let's talk more about what works and what we trust, to reinforce this in the face of all the talk of misery. "**

There are many levels to building trust. Many of the participants in the dialogues spoke about how maintaining one's physical and mental capacity builds confidence in coping with everyday life. Older participants stressed the importance of taking a preventive approach to safety: exercise and hobbies, taking a mobile phone, map, GPS, and compass when going berry picking, wearing spiked shoes in slippery conditions, wearing a safety bracelet, practicing CPR and recording your own advance directive. Younger participants said they attach importance to taking care of their health, fitness, and daily routines.

Self-reliance can also be seen as a way of taking responsibility for others.

*I'm still in good shape, even though I'm over 90. I haven't had any help from anyone. There are health professionals close to me, but I don't want to burden them, I want to manage on my own.*





You can also strengthen your sense of security mentally. Participants who have lived in difficult life situations and threatening environments in the past described their tolerance for fear as being their strength today. Experiences of overcoming difficult situations build confidence and trust in their own skills, abilities, and future.

Amid the constant talk of social crisis and problems, some participants consciously want to strengthen an attitude of hope and trust in themselves and in the people around them. In practice, this means, for example, believing in the availability and functioning of public services, emphasizing positive possibilities for the future, and giving examples of the resilience of individuals and society in difficult situations such as the covid pandemic.

Creativity, art, and imagination also play an important role in fostering a sense of security:

*Art can be such a cohesive force and such a force for security (...) This does not exclude that art can deal with unpleasant things and tell us what the world can be like. In my opinion, it doesn't always have to be safe, but can be an opportunity to seek out art that creates a sense of one's own safety.*





## Social relations and communities

### "Trust is between people, not between institutions."

The most important confidence-building factor in participants' daily lives is their relationships with others and their involvement in different communities. For many, the closest safety net is their own loved ones:

*Relationships are important as you get older. We haven't spent a single night alone (...) This brings security and health is better too. I would have been "done" if my partner hadn't been there when I had the sickness. As a couple we can manage, alone we couldn't.*

The circle of trust expands through the activities and encounters that take place together: the housing association's charity work, the renovation of the old village hall, friends' chambers and meeting places, community sing-alongs and community hangouts are examples of activities in which participants have got to know each other and become part of a group. Families with children are looking for community activities in their own areas where families can get to know each other, and free activities for children and young people where safe adults are also present. From a parent's point of view, it is safer if they know where and with whom their children spend their free time and if they can exchange information and experiences with other parents. In the school world, cohesion and trust are created by cooperation between school and families:

*School-parent cooperation and family interaction has deteriorated a lot since my own childhood, when we did more together and got to know each other. It creates a sense of security to be able to contact other parents with a low threshold.*

An individualistic culture can create insecurity when everything is on your shoulders: life management, finances, and security. Some participants hope that education, culture, and ways of doing things will become more communal across the board. By fostering and strengthening community, people of all ages can meet, find meaningful things to do, have a say and feel part of a group.

The experience of giving and receiving help has strengthened participants' confidence. Help is provided through volunteer work as sports coaches, outdoor buddies, helplines, and local meeting places, among others. Help has come from family members, friends, neighbors and sometimes strangers:

*There was a situation where I couldn't stand and a young couple came to ask if I needed help and they of course helped me and I wasn't far from home, so they helped me home. You know you're not alone if you're on a shopping trip.*

Everyday community and the giving and receiving of help is also important because, whatever one thinks about the state of the welfare society and its services,

*There are not enough professionals to provide services for everyone. How can we better support each other?*

People actively involved in community affairs, and civil society more broadly with its various actors, strengthen the confidence of participants in the goodwill of people and society as a whole:

*On the organizational side, you meet a lot of nice, helpful, positive people who believe in tomorrow. Here too, there is a duality: if you follow certain types of media, you get one view of the times, but if you meet people, the picture is quite different.*

Many participants think that Finns are honest and benevolent by nature. It is easy to trust that things are done well and according to the rules. Trust is also seen to engender trust: for example, when a young person experiences that they are trusted by being given responsibility at work or in a hobby, this also strengthens their will to be worthy of trust.

*Trust and community grow through trust: when you give someone responsibility, they feel worthy of it, and trust breeds good.*

Communities are often not automatically open and welcoming to new people, but conscious attention must be paid to this. Examples shared by the participants include making eye contact, friendly greetings, making space to get to know each other, team building, clear and stated policies and conscious community leadership. This supports community building, working together and bringing new people into the fold.

Discussants who were in prison talked about practicing trust. In prison conditions, security is created by a daily life as normal as possible: good mornings, routines, following rules and 'everyone keeping their word'.

*The staff played a really big role in making me feel safe (...) My history was that you're cornered, and you always have to defend yourself. And when you have guards whose way of being was relaxed and calm and on a human level (...) then that vulnerable little kid inside might get upset... even if I was wearing a tough guy mask. I remember with fondness many different guards whose calm presence brought a warm atmosphere.*

Based on the dialogues, facing diversity still seems to be a challenge for Finns, where the fear of foreignness seems to cause fear and timidity. Therefore, building trust also requires breaking down prejudices:

*The confidence comes when you go towards the stranger and find that there are more things in common than there are things that are different. Finding things that unite builds trust.*

Especially those who have moved to Finland from other countries have experienced insecurity and isolation in a new country, where they do not yet know anyone and are not part of the local community:

*I think part of the sense of security that I've felt or felt lacking is perhaps related to belonging, a sense of belonging somewhere. And I'm not talking about nationality or speaking a language, I'm talking about being included.*

Dialogue participants particularly value communities where they can be their strange and quirky, sometimes vulnerable selves. The experience of being accepted and of finding a place where everyone can be who they are is central to their sense of security. Some participants have good experiences of events or occasions where the principles of safer spaces have been applied. They would like to see a discussion in their own social groups about how each individual can create a sense of safety for others through their own behavior and how language is also linked to safety:

*It's safe to speak different languages, or you don't have to speak only Finnish, you can also use English and look up words.*

## Citizen participation and administrative transparency

**"When you trust a person, they strive to be worthy of trust."**

The dialogues reflected on the importance of participation and its strengthening as a source of trust, both from the point of view of "ordinary citizens" and professionals working in services and public administration.

When designing new services or entering new contracts, it is important to involve the individual or family from the start, to avoid situations where the service does not meet needs. Positive experiences of participation have also been generated by caring staff, good and listening leadership, and different participatory methods such as service design and the Timeout Dialogue.

*The system must also demonstrate trust in customers, and this mutual trust is an essential part of a functioning service system.*

Even in challenging situations where resources are scarce and the service cannot be provided, professionals are expected to be honest:

*Clients are told what they want to know, not given false promises.*

In addition to services, participants call for the strengthening of participation in regional and urban planning. Urban planning can influence people's experience of security. The key is preventing

segregation: different sized and rented and owner-occupied housing in the same areas, substance abuse services located also in so-called upmarket areas, space for people to live and work, common meeting places both outdoors and indoors, inviting benches and places to hang out.

One group that is neglected in urban planning is children. In one discussion, it was pointed out that children need to be taken into account not only in the planning of kindergartens and schools, but also elsewhere. For example, darkness makes children feel unsafe and therefore lighting in playgrounds, but also in other environments, should be given special attention. Some of the participants pointed out that children's participation in all planning and decision-making should be extended in Finland.

The dialogues were attended by several government employees, who reflected on their own work and citizens' trust in the state and its administration. Some of the participants felt that while Finland has traditionally had a high level of trust in the authorities, there is now more questioning of the authorities than ever before. Public authorities may be perceived as an extension of politics, with the result that the weakened trust in politicians is also reflected in the work of civil servants. Employees experience 'increasing pressure from clients, both online and through direct contact'. Sometimes things are misinterpreted, sometimes false information is deliberately spread.

*It may take more constant work to build that trust than in the past.*

However, a good and competent civil service is seen as providing stability and continuity amid political turmoil. Transparency, well-founded and publicly available decisions and solutions, a helpful and positive atmosphere and clear communication are the basis for an open and fair administration:

*As civil servants let's make sure that we use language and communicate things in a way that as many people as possible can understand as unambiguously as possible.*

From the citizen's point of view, trust in public authorities and institutions is also built on transparency:

*How we see child protection in society, how it is trusted as an institution. And not just child protection, but also national defense or the police or the judicial system or schools. The more secretive they are, at least the less I feel that they increase my security, or that I can trust them if I don't know what they are doing.*

However, it was pointed out in the officials' discussions that hybrid influence can also benefit from transparency and a broad public perception. Information critical to the functioning of society and affecting national security needs to be well protected and there is a constant balancing act between security and transparency. However, most things can be communicated, and trust is strengthened by 'going public in good time, whether internally or externally'. Internally, this means, for example, that when it was decided to make cuts in the state administration, the management immediately held an information session on the subject. This increased confidence in the employer. The same is true, according to the participants, for informing the public.

According to participants' experiences, 'informal meetings with the authorities build trust on both sides' and a preventive approach helps people to trust the police, for example. Trust in the police was also generally considered to be good, despite the challenging setting: 'the police do have to observe citizens in certain situations' and 'there is always a reason for meeting the police and it is not pleasant'. In police work, you also encounter people who do not trust anyone or anything, especially the 'fucking cops'. However, participants who have had a lot of contact with the police over the course of their lives say that as their own lives have calmed down, the mutual trust with police has gradually built up.

One civil servant who participated in the dialogues describes trust as the "glue" or "concrete base" for everything we do: cooperation within the organization and between different professional groups, as well as with citizens and stakeholders. The dialogues recall that, from the point of view of trust, every encounter between an official and a citizen is valuable:

*You can either build trust, or you cause it to crumble.*



## Dialogue

**"Being heard creates inclusion, inclusion creates community, and community creates security."**

For the participants in the National Dialogues, being in dialogue gave them the experience that trust can be built in the moment through encounter and discussion. In particular, the humanity and sense of community that emerged from the dialogues impressed people and created a feeling of understanding from other people. This in turn increased the sense of security of the participants, which can also have longer lasting effects.

Participants want to see an end to deliberate exaggeration, stigmatization and forcing people to be right in their interactions and public debates. Instead, there should be more listening to others and an effort to understand different perspectives.

Dialogues that bring together people from different backgrounds can also build trust on the basis of diversity. This requires meeting each person as an individual, not making assumptions based on appearance or dress, being interested in the experiences of others, and looking for what unites rather than what divides. It is the encounters that break down prejudices that are needed in a society of constant confrontation and eroding trust. They can show that each of us wants to feel safe and live in a safe society, even if the means to achieve this may vary:

*I believe that everyone strives for security, even if we have different ideas on how to achieve it. For some, it means shutting out all the different ones, closing borders, staying in your own bubble. For others, it means meeting and getting to know and learning and being curious, expanding your own world.*



**Participants' sources of security and trust:**

ENCOUNTER, MUTUALLY AGREED BOUNDARIES AND RULES, HOUSING AND MONEY, NATURE, RELATIONSHIPS, CHILDREN, FAMILY, FOSTER CARE, HOBBIES, HEALTH, ROOTS, ROUTINES, COTTAGE, BIRDSONG, EMOTIONAL SKILLS, INFRASTRUCTURE, SENSE OF CONTROL, ANTICIPATION, STORIES, DIALOGUES, RESPECTING CONTRACTS, AGENCY, INTERACTION, FINANCIAL SECURITY, MUSIC,

RESPECT, SHARED CONCERNS, PRESIDENT AND MILITARY, EXERCISE, BEING AWAY FROM THE INTERNET, RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, AUTHORITIES, RELATIVES, HEALTH, BERRY PICKING, INDEPENDENCE, ART, BASIC SUBSISTENCE, WELFARE STATE, DAILY ROUTINES, KINDNESS AND CORDIALITY, BEING HEARD AND ENCOUNTERED, ADEQUATE RESOURCES, THEATRE, EMPATHY, ADULTS PRESENT, LOCAL SCHOOL, POSITIVITY, NEIGHBORLINESS, BEING ACCEPTED AS ONE'S SELF, INCLUSION, FLEXIBILITY, FOOD, STUDENT CARE, OPEN COMMUNICATION, CROSS-AGE GROUP SHARING, SOURCE CRITICISM AND FACT-CHECKING, COMPETENT CIVIL SERVICE, PLAIN LANGUAGE, DOGS, LEGAL PROTECTION, STATE, LANGUAGE SKILLS, SOCIAL NETWORK, CHURCH, FAMILIARITY, SPORTS, PATIENT ORGANIZATIONS, NIGHT LIGHT, NON-BULLYING, POSITIVE THINKING, ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE, EYE CONTACT, GRANDMA'S HOUSE, FAMILIAR APARTMENT BUILDING, EXPERTISE, DECISION TO TRUST, DREAMS, DEALING WITH EMOTIONS, STABILITY, FREEDOM, FOOD IN THE FRIDGE AND SOMEONE WAITING, POSITIVE MEDIA STORIES, SPEED OF INFORMATION, RUBBISH COLLECTION, INTERNET AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION, SERVICES THAT WORK, PEER-TO-PEER, SHARING, TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT, FINNISH PASSPORT, MULTILINGUALISM, NETWORKS OF AFFECTION, STRONG USER IDENTIFICATION, PERSEVERANCE, CONCERTS, NATO, LIVING ON A SALARY, VOTING, ELDERLY, YARD WORK, LOCAL COMMUNITIES, ABSENCE OF STIGMA, HONESTY, EQUALITY, CARETAKER, COMMON SENSE, YLE, GOOD DEEDS.

## 5. Conclusions

The knowledge generated by the National Dialogues, through the experiences of people from different walks of life and socio-economic backgrounds, helps us to understand how a sense of security and trust is built up in people's everyday lives. The dialogues shed light on the experiences that affect people's sense of security and trust, and on the similarities and differences between these experiences in the lives of people of different ages, living in different parts of Finland and in different life situations.

The main conclusions of the Spring 2024 National Dialogues are:

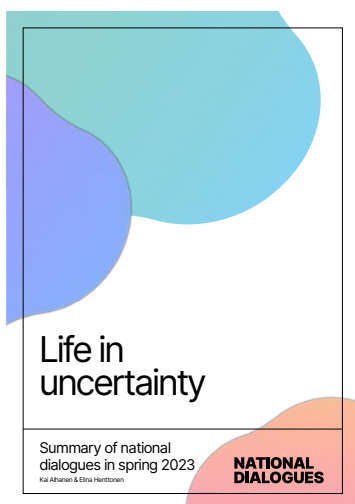
1. The insecurity experienced by citizens has increased. This is reflected in lower confidence in the safety nets of society and in the predictability of their own lives. Increased unpredictability and the perceived erosion of safety nets are narrowing the circle of trust for many people, and putting individuals on an unequal footing in terms of the extent to which support and help is available in their immediate community.
2. Insecurity and the uncertainty are simultaneously shaking up many areas of life: work and livelihoods, welfare and care, social cohesion, the relevance and reliability of information, international relations and, ultimately, the very fabric of life on the planet. Many of the concerning changes seem permanent and it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to believe that things will get better again in the future. Facing an uncertain future becomes even more difficult if people are unable to trust each other or the society's ability to cope.

3. In the face of increased insecurity, citizens have solid ideas on how to repair eroding trust while strengthening their sense of security. Trust can be built on many levels: by helping people to take charge of their own capacity to act, by creating community-building encounters, by strengthening citizen participation and a better understanding of governance as a basis for decision-making, and by creating positive images of the future. It is important for policy makers and administrations to recognize that citizens' experience of safety and security in society is influenced above all by the concrete conditions of their daily lives, the availability and functioning of public services, and the fairness of political decision-making.



# Appendix: Previous National Dialogues

## Spring 2023: Life in uncertainty



The Spring 2023 National Dialogues “Life in Uncertainty” drew a picture of the experiences of around 660 people of living in uncertainty. The National Dialogues had a diverse group of participants, so the summary includes the voices of people from different age groups, professional groups, and cultural backgrounds. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of citizens’ ways of understanding and dealing with the present, in which different crises follow one another.

The summary shows what uncertainty feels like in the lives of different individuals and the meanings people give to it. At the same time, the experiential data generated by the dialogues show the causal relationships that participants associate with the uncertainties they experience. We gain insight into the ways that uncertainties arising from economic, health-related, or global crises affect people’s lives. This will also create understanding of how the impacts differ according to individuals’ backgrounds and life situations.

The main findings of the Spring 2023 National Dialogues were:

1. Majority of the citizens who took part in the dialogues felt that their lives had become more uncertain. Uncertainty was perceived to have increased in their daily lives, in society and globally.
2. Another source of uncertainty is the perceived increase of polarization in society, which causes strain on national unity.
3. Uncertainty treats people in different life situations differently. Uncertainties accumulate especially onto people living in vulnerable economic, social or health situations.
4. As a result of increased uncertainty, many feel their faith in the future had weakened. Many are concerned about the future of children and young people, the erosion of the welfare state and its services, and global crises concerning the economy, wars, the state of democracy and the carrying capacity of the planet.
5. The most important factors that made living with uncertainty easier were a sense of community, everyday well-being skills and acting according to one’s own values.

## Autumn 2023: Together and Alone



The Autumn 2023 National Dialogues discussed the theme “Together and Alone”. The 68 dialogues organized around Finland brought together 650 participants to build a contemporary picture of communities and encounters in Finland.

The summary describes how people perceive the importance of social ties in their own lives, and what are the pain points in Finnish communities and life situations where people are at risk of falling outside of their communities. Experiential insights from the dialogues shed light on the importance of local communities such as family, friends, work, school, and hobbies. It also provides a broader view of the different social strata of Finnish society, to which many people feel they belong but outside of which some feel excluded.

The main conclusions of the Autumn 2023 National Dialogues were:

1. We are living in a time where digitalization, hybrid work, crises and the reorganization of public services are affecting the way we interact with each other and work as communities. Alongside this, we are increasingly faced with political and social challenges that divide people into camps. People feel that we have not taken enough care of our communities, with the result that many communities are at risk of deteriorating.
2. The dialogues made visible the different stages of the life cycle, where anyone can experience difficulties in attaching to new communities. At the same time, a persistent and cumulative loneliness can be observed among many people. The more communities deteriorate, the harder it hits people in the most vulnerable life situations. Community fragmentation also undermines the resilience of both individuals and society to crises.
3. We need a change in culture and mindset, where communities are noticed, invested in, and consciously managed. Such a change requires *community agency* - the understanding, capacity, and willingness to build and lead communities. Public authorities and services can also play a stronger role in supporting and enabling community and in shaping the fertile ground for citizens to take ownership of their communities.

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# **NATIONAL DIALOGUES**

Published 2024